

“I don’t want to be a freak!” An Interrogation of the Negotiation of Masculinities in Two Aotearoa New Zealand Primary Schools.

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Māori Proverb

E moe ana te mata hī tuna, e ara te mata hī aua

The mullet fisher sleeps but the eel catcher is alert.

Those content with mediocre returns need not be attentive to their work
but those who try for more desirable goals must ever be alert for possibilities.

(Denise Sheat Te Taumutu Rūnanga).

Abstract

Increasingly since the 1990s those of us who are interested in gender issues in education have heard the question: What about the boys? A discourse has emerged in New Zealand, as in other countries including Australia, Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom, that attention spent on addressing issues related to the educational needs of girls has resulted in the neglect of boys and problems related to their schooling. Positioned within this discourse, boys are depicted as disadvantaged, victims of feminism, underachieving or failing within the alienating feminised schooling environment and their struggles at school are seen as a symptom of a wider 'crisis of masculinity'. This anxiety about boys has generated much debate and a number of explanations for the school performance of boys. One concern, that has remained largely unexamined in the Aotearoa New Zealand context, is that the dominant discourse of masculinity is characterised by a restless physicality, anti-intellectualism, misbehaviour and opposition to authority all of which are construed as antithetical to success at school. This thesis explores how masculinities are played out in the schooling experiences of a small group of 5, 6 and 7 year old boys in two New Zealand primary schools as they construct, embody and enact their gendered subjectivities both as boys and as pupils.

This study of how the lived realities of schooling for these boys are discursively constituted is informed by feminist poststructuralism, aspects of queer theory and, in particular, draws on the works of Michel Foucault. The research design involved employing an innovative mix of data generating strategies. The discursive analysis of the data generated in focus group discussions, classroom and playground observations, children's drawings and video and audio recording of the normal classroom literacy programmes is initially organised around these sites of learning in

order to explore how gender is produced discursively, embodied and enacted as children go about their work and their play.

The research shows that although considerable diversity was apparent as the boys fashioned their masculinities in these different sites, 'doing boy' is not inimical to 'doing schoolboy' as all the boys, when required to, were able to constitute themselves as 'intelligible' pupils (Youdell, 2006). The research findings challenge the notion of school as a feminised and alienating environment for them. In particular, instances of some of the boys disrupting the established classroom norms, as recorded by feminist researchers more than two decades ago, are documented. Concerns then, that "classroom practices reinforced a notion of male importance and superiority while diminishing the interests and status of girls" (Allen, 2009, p. 124) appear to still be relevant, and the postfeminist discourse "that gender equity has now been achieved for girls and women in education" (Ringrose, 2013, p. 1) is called into question. Amid the greater emphasis on measuring easily quantifiable aspects of pupils' educational achievement, what this analysis does is to recognize the processes of schooling as highly complex and to offer a more nuanced response to the question of boys and their schooling than that offered by, for example, men's rights advocates. It suggests that if we are committed to improving education for all children, the question needs to be re/framed so as not to lose sight of educational issues related to girls and needs to ask just *which* particular groups of boys *and* which particular groups of girls are currently being disadvantaged in our schools.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Why Boys and Why Now?

It is another cold, frosty morning in late June when I arrive at Shene Primary School to continue my observations of the Years 1, 2, and 3 children in Rua, Room 2. Knowing how cold Christchurch winters are and how bleak classrooms can be first thing in the morning, I am wrapped up warmly in scarf, gloves and overcoat. I like to arrive in good time to check the video recording equipment and make the most of the chance to watch informally and perhaps interact with the children as they arrive for the day. A few arrive with adults but many do not. Some are bundled up well in colourful parkas and knitted earmuff hats which they soon shed apparently unaffected by the cold. Others are less well clad. One girl is in a short-sleeved t-shirt. I cannot recall if this is all she arrived in, but I hope not. However, it is the slogan on this rather non-descript brown shirt to which my attention is drawn. Across the chest in bold pink script it reads: WHAT BOYS DO...It is only when she turns around that its full significance becomes apparent. On the back it reads: GIRLS DO BETTER. Before I get a chance to talk to her about her shirt, the children are called to the mat and their daily routine begins and I too am absorbed with my notebooks and recording equipment. However, this 'girl power' slogan, that pits girls against boys, stays with me and I resolve that, just out of curiosity, sometime later in the day I'll use it to search the Internet. Interestingly, when I do the search the first page of results is all about the media's current concerns with differences in educational achievement between girls and boys (Field notes, 21 June).

Boys and their schooling, and in particular their academic achievements, have been subjected to close scrutiny over many years now, especially since the mid-1990s, and 'girl power' campaigns have been implicated by some as having a detrimental effect on boys (Fox, 2006; Francis, 2005; Sommers, 2000). Issues arising from this attention to boys and their schooling have generated a great deal of debate in a number of countries including Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States as well as here in Aotearoa New Zealand. Increasingly, these debates have been framed in response to the question — "what about the boys?" — a question often posed within anti-feminist or post-feminist discourses that position all boys as

educationally disadvantaged, as the newly oppressed group in schools, and failing in schools which are seen as overly feminised, if not anti-boy, environments. Very often in the debates calls are made for special provisions for boys in the form of 'boy-friendly schooling', single-sex classes within co-educational schools, the provision of more positive male role models in schools and the need for schools to become more knowledgeable about ways of incorporating boys' preferred 'learning styles' into their classroom practices (Education Review Office, 2000). Some advocates for these measures suggest that second-wave feminist initiatives since the 1970s and early 1980s, that sought to highlight and rectify the ways in which girls and women were educationally disadvantaged, now unfairly advantage girls and that campaigns such as the 'girls can do anything' and 'girls are powerful', exemplified in the above t-shirt slogan, have gone too far (Sommers, 2000).

Jessica Ringrose (2007) questions the adequacy of positioning these debates as simply anti-feminist or as evidence of a feminist backlash. She prefers the notion of 'post-feminism' as being more useful given the complexities of forces that come into play to shape the terrain and the debates about family, gender and education, and work. In doing so she points to the importance of considering changes that have taken place beyond the school gates, such as the impact of neoliberalism, to understand fully contemporary educational concerns about gender. She goes on to draw on Angela McRobbie's 2004 work on post-feminism and popular culture to describe post-feminist discourse as the argument that feminism(s) are no longer required, as equality has been achieved, which then renders feminist concerns for girls and their schooling experiences as outmoded or obsolete. In doing so she indicates that these debates are not static but have changed subtly over time as have the social and political contexts within which they have been framed. However, while she does concede that some aspects of feminism(s) have been incorporated into wider society she describes as a new 'schoolgirl fiction' (Ringrose, 2007, p. 472)

the 'truth claim' that girls schooling success, in terms of academic achievements, represents a feminist victory won at the expense of boys.

In the Beginning: A Preamble to the Thesis

In many ways the impetus for this research project stemmed from my involvement in an earlier project. In 2004 I was invited to take part in a research project to be conducted in a co-educational primary school that had set up a single-sex class of Years 7 and 8 boys (10-13 year -olds). The class had been implemented in response to the widespread concerns about boys' educational achievements generally, and in an effort to meet the needs of a group of boys who were described as 'at risk' and as having been a problem for several years due to their being unable or unwilling to participate in the school's learning culture. During the year, on the occasions when I sat at the back of the classroom observing the boys, I was startled by the high levels of disruptive behaviour by some of the high-status boys, then referred to in the international literature as 'laddishness' (Jackson, 2002, 2010). The findings from this project corresponded with studies from overseas in concluding that the single-sex class strategy was implemented with a 'common sense' essentialist understanding of gender. In this instance it was based on the essentialist writings of Steve Biddulph. This 'mythopoetic politics' approach (Schwalbe, 2007) resulted in a classroom culture where 'laddish' behaviour, such as 'having a laugh' and being disruptive (Francis & Skelton, 2005), was perpetuated rather than prevented. What also became apparent to me in the course of this project was the paucity of research in Aotearoa New Zealand into issues of gender, masculinities and schooling in particular, and into gender and sexualities more generally, that was informed by theoretical frameworks that enable a sophisticated analysis and systematic documentation of the material, socio-cultural and discursive production of masculinities (Haywood & Mac an Ghail, 2013).

Much of the educational research literature related to 'laddishness' and the question of whether or not these 'macho' attitudes result in 'anti-school' attitudes that impede boys' progress at school, focuses on the experiences of boys at the secondary school level (Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Martino, 1999; Younger and Warrington, 2005; Jackson, 2006). This set me pondering if the beginnings of such attitudes might be detected in the 5-6 year-old age group that I had taught for over twenty years beginning in the 1970s. Much has changed since the 1970s when feminist concerns in education focussed on the educational attainment of girls and the subsequent disadvantages they experienced in the workplace. Since the 1990s educational discourses of 'failing boys' have dominated public debates and a number of different discourses regarding boys and schooling have emerged including 'poor boys', 'failing boys', 'at risk boys' and 'problem boys'. Neoliberalism, with its central image of the 'free market' (Connell, 2010) and regimes of 'competitive individualism' and 'accountability' (Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012), has become thoroughly embedded in Aotearoa New Zealand since the 1980s. One of the impacts of neoliberalism on education has been greater emphasis on standards, assessment procedures and the reporting of narrowly defined academic achievements amid greater surveillance and performance appraisal of both teachers and pupils.

Since children construct their gendered subjectivities relationally, with masculinity being what femininity is not, and vice versa (Francis & Skelton, 2005), in this thesis I investigate how 5, 6 and 7 year olds construct and negotiate their gender subjectivities in different settings within two primary schools. On the understanding that different contexts give rise to different discursive interaction patterns and hence potentially produce different data, I facilitated focus group discussions and observed children both in and out of the classroom. I focus on seven boys to argue that although a range of masculinities is constituted, embodied, regulated and policed in each of the setting, each boy performs his version of masculinity in ways that means he is recognizable and affirmed as an intelligible school boy in the classroom

(Youdell, 2006); 'doing boy' is not inimical to 'doing schoolboy'. However, what I also document is evidence that there is a tendency for some boys to demand more attention by 'out-voicing' (Francis, 2005) girls in the classroom and to physically dominate the school playground (Thorne, 1993; Connolly, 2003; Paechter, 2007). Although contested by some of the more feisty girls, already in these young children there is emerging a tendency, on the part of some, for masculinities to be constructed as assertive and demanding and for femininities to be constituted as more self-effacing by deferring to boys. After exploring these themes in detail in each of the research settings and considering their implications for us as teachers and teacher educators, the thesis concludes with a consideration of ways of moving forward including an examination of and reflection on how best to address the diverse educational needs of boys.

Boys and Schooling: The Debates

In this chapter I provide an overview of these debates, explore their nature and highlight their shortcomings. Particular reference is made to the Aotearoa New Zealand context but I also argue for the importance of positioning them globally, politically and historically. My aim is to present a more thoughtful and nuanced feminist analysis of the issues that avoids creating a false binary opposition between boys' schooling and girls' schooling and that deconstructs the largely media-driven, globalized moral panic about boys that constitutes them and their 'underachievement' as symptomatic of a wider discourse, a so-called 'crisis in masculinity' (Morgan, 2006). I conclude with a discussion of what I believe is missing from the debates about boys and their schooling, particularly here in Aotearoa New Zealand, and the contribution that this research seeks to make in answer to the question "what *about* the boys?"

Although a very early work now, the introduction to *Failing Boys?: Issues in Gender and Achievement* by Debbie Epstein, Jannette Elwood, Valerie Hey and Janet Maw (1998) shows how to employ discourse analysis to explore the public debates about boys and their schooling. As such it is both a testament to their enduring nature and a useful framework for considering just how these debates have changed and evolved. The authors identify three major perspectives in the United Kingdom debates which they describe as the 'poor boys' discourse, the 'failing schools failing boys' discourse and the 'boys will be boys' discourse. A careful analysis of the various discourses is important since, as pointed out by Becky Francis and Christine Skelton (2005), each governs how the issues of boys and schooling are understood and what sort of remedies are proposed to address these concerns.

Epstein *et al.* (1998) describe the 'poor boys' discourse as one that constructs boys as victims in education. Women, and in particular feminists, are to blame for boys' disenchantment with schooling and their educational underachievement relative to girls. Schools are said to have become feminized environments where feminist agendas, to address female educational disadvantage, have gone too far. Boys, at the hands of their mothers, since so many are from fatherless families, and due to the preponderance of women teachers, are said to be swamped with some form of matriarchal ideology that makes them 'soft' and denies them access to their 'essential maleness' (Gurian, 2002; Sommers, 2000; Biddulph, 2004; Bly, 1991). Solutions proposed to address this perceived imbalance call for the reinstatement of masculine values in schools both in terms of curriculum content with 'lots of appeal to boys' and teaching styles that are in tune with 'boys' ways of learning' such as problem solving, competition and active, physical, outdoor learning experiences. The provision of more male role models for boys in the form of 'mentors' and recruitment drives to increase the number of men in teaching is proposed as apt strategies to promote boys' achievements. However, as Epstein and her associates point out, such measures to re-establish a more masculine ethos in schools rather

than interrogating the role that hegemonic versions of masculinity play in boys' schooling "work to reinstate and recuperate them" (1998, p. 7).

This reinstatement of masculine values has been described by Bob Lingard, Wayne Martino and Martin Mills (2009) as a particular kind of 'recuperative masculinity politics'. They describe it as seeking "to reconstitute male as norm and return to a pre-feminist gender order" (p. 20). The danger lies not only in ignoring the classroom needs of girls and a heightened emphasis on the differences between girls and boys but also in drawing on conventional masculine cultures to valorize and ingrain macho stereotypes of competition, aggression and unbridled heterosexuality. Lingard *et al.* also point out that calls for more men in teaching tend to draw the focus away from their classroom pedagogy to "emphasize the embodied presence of males" (p. 2)¹. Studies of males in teaching show a propensity for some of them to adopt aspects of laddism in their interactions with boys (Jackson, 2010). This involves courting popularity by projecting a 'one of the lads' persona involving having a bit of a laugh, sharing an interest in 'typical' male pastimes such as sport and going out for a drink, and objectifying women. Such strategies, rather than challenging laddish cultures, appear to collude with it. Jackson emphasizes that "the incitement to perform hegemonic masculinity in school is strong" (2010, p. 512) since teaching is often positioned as feminine, as it involves caring for children, so that male teachers demonstrate their masculinity by distancing themselves from the femininity through accentuating their interest in and commitment to traditional masculine pursuits. A *Times Educational Supplement* of Jackson's research reported that:

One female teacher described her laddish colleague as: "Like the biggest lad in the class ... But it doesn't actually stop the laddishness. It actually makes it even worse, because then you're an idol" (Bloom, 2010).

¹ The theory of embodiment is explored in detail in Chapter 2

With classroom dynamics such as these it is easy to see how hegemonic versions of masculinity remain unproblematicized.

The second discourse 'failing schools, failing boys' derives from the logic of the neoliberal doctrine and the application of managerial principles to education. Neoliberalism, an economic rather than a social analysis (Bowl & Tobias, 2012, p. 17), is based on the belief that the market is paramount and the key role of education is to produce the human capital necessary for economic prosperity. Or, as Ivan Snook so tellingly described it, schools and pupils are positioned as merely "servants of the national economy" (2009, p. 6). Pupils from successful schools have high levels of proficiency in literacy and numeracy and thus are able to attain the credentials that prepare them for full participation in their nation's economic survival within the increasingly globally deregulated, competitive, capitalist environment. Educational success or failure lies within individual self managing schools rather than resulting from wider social inequalities based on class, gender, race or ethnicity. With its masculinist language of targets, standards, accountability and effectiveness individual pupils and individual schools are governed² by continual formative and summative assessments, especially the public reporting of performance in final examinations. Since boys are claimed to not be achieving the same levels of success as girls in these high stakes assessments, schools are said to be failing boys. A distinguishing feature of this 'failing schools' discourse is that, within the marketization model of education, the blame for boys' underachievement has been placed on individual self managing schools for ineffective teaching so this discourse seldom directly targets feminism as the cause of 'failing boys' despite a heavy reliance on masculinist language in the discourse of schools as businesses with 'outcomes' and 'targets' to be met. In their 2005 reassessment of the debates about

² In the Foucauldian sense, 'governmentality' or 'conduct of conduct' where populations are managed by the political power of certain economic discourses

boys and schooling, Becky Francis and Christine Skelton argue that this discourse is less prevalent than when Epstein *et al.* (1998) first articulated it.

Finally there is the common-sense 'boys will be boys' discourse which is said to abound in everyday conversations about boys and girls. Here, boys are not only characterized as but also celebrated for their natural rambunctious, competitive, cheeky, sport-loving, slipshod attitude when it comes to formal learning, and their somewhat wayward but redeemably likeable ways. This essentialist discourse accounts for these stereotypical characteristics with reference to unchanging and unchangeable biological differences between males and females. In keeping with the poor boys discourse, it positions boys as 'suffering' because schools fail to take into account what is referred to their 'core masculinity' (Biddulph, 2004). Of particular significance to Epstein *et al.* (1998) is the contradiction in this line of reasoning. On the one hand boys' laddish behaviours result from natural psychological and biological differences but, on the other hand, their poor academic achievement results from extrinsic factors such as inadequacies in teaching methods and the feminized school environment. A significant shortcoming of this discourse, and indeed of all three, is to depict boys and girls as homogeneous categories — boys and girls are essentially different but within each category essentially the same (Martino, Kehler & Weaver-Hightower, 2009). Boys are seen as all experiencing schooling in the same way and differences that might arise due to social class, race, ethnicity, dis/ability, sexuality, age or religion are simply not recognized. However, in the Aotearoa New Zealand context, while this discourse of boys and girls as essentially different continues in the more populist writings, Ministry of Education publications such as *Quality Teaching for Diverse Students in Schooling* recognize any group of learners as heterogeneous and that "differences between students are fluid and changing" (Alton-Lee 2003, p. 5).

In their 2005 reassessment of key debates about gender and achievement Becky Francis and Christine Skelton, as well as noting the decline in the 'failing schools, failing boys' discourse, pay attention to what they describe as unspoken "broader philosophical and political questions upon which these debates might be seen to be predicated" (p. 1) and identify two further discourses – the 'problem boy' and the "'at risk" boy' (p. 49). These perspectives maintain that boys are alienated from society and their disaffection becomes apparent in anti-social behaviour within education as well as in society more generally. Within schools it results in an unwillingness or inability to engage with learning, a lack of respect for authority, disruptive behaviour and prioritising sport over academic work (Jackson, 2010). Drug and alcohol abuse, drink/drug driving fatalities, vandalism, and youth suicide rates are taken as indicators of boys' lack of direction, their disconnect from society. This feeling of social exclusion is said to create a vulnerability in boys that, in turn, accounts for their disruptive behaviours. What is particularly interesting about this viewpoint is that it relocates the blame for the 'problem' with the boys themselves:

'Problem boys' are a threat to society: "'at risk" boys' are made vulnerable by society when it fails to tackle (traditional) forms of masculinity. Put simply, trying to be a boy in today's society places them under a great deal of pressure to act in particular ways and in doing so creates psychological struggles and tensions – that is, it makes them 'ill' (Francis & Skelton, 2005, p. 53-4).

This medicalisation of issues relating to boys and their schooling is seen as just part of a widespread pathologization of everyday human experiences. For example, children's behaviour that might once have been described as 'high-spirited' is now a sign of attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder and needing to be treated with prescription medicine (Furedi, 2004; Armstrong, 2003).

Skelton and Francis join with Martin Mills, University of Queensland, Australia, to compare and contrast gender policies in Australia and the United Kingdom (2009). They elaborate on the construction of 'boys as a problem' by situating it within Neoliberalism in what they describe as the concept of 'a "something for something" pact' (p. 47). This doctrine positions the individual as responsible for making the most of all opportunities to succeed within the neoliberal economy. A diligent, responsible pupil is one who works hard in keeping with the meritocratic ideal that effort and ability pay off in the form of educational credentials. It is the individual who is at fault for failing to succeed within such a socio-economic milieu. 'Underachieving pupils' are not fulfilling their side of the bargain and as such are a possible stumbling block to economic success. Underperformance by boys, arising from their insecurities and vulnerability, that manifests itself in a lack of application or disruptive behaviour, is seen as the antithesis of the ideal pupil³ and as such a problem; a problem of wasted potential and eventually a threat to the nation's economic well-being.

The 'Boy Turn' in Aotearoa New Zealand

Marcus Weaver-Hightower defines the 'boy turn' as "a refocusing from girls' issues to boys' issues" (2009, p. 2) in research into gender issues in education. He notes strong similarities in the discourses in various countries such as Australia, Canada, Japan, Iceland and England and in the research and policy making that has resulted. While there are definite parallels with the way the 'boy turn' has played out here in Aotearoa New Zealand there are also some differences. For instance, under one of the more sensational headlines to appear in Aotearoa New Zealand newspapers 'Boys – the classroom timebomb' (Fox, 2006) a report on a three day national

³ Interestingly, Jessica Ringrose (2007) argues that the continuing debates about boys and achievement have fuelled a "seductive post-feminist discourse of girl power" (p. 471) where girls' educational performance, the successful girl, is a sign that neoliberal educational policies are working.

conference on educating boys, Dr Paul Baker, rector of Waitaki Boys High School, is reported as “calling for the Ministry of Education to establish a substantial review of the curriculum, learning and assessment” to address the gap between girls’ and boys’ achievements. Where the Australian House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education went as far as releasing a report *Boys: Getting it Right* that then resulted in a federal wide policy on boys’ education, Aotearoa New Zealand has not heeded Baker’s call and followed Australia’s lead. However, an analysis of some of Baker’s comments, as reported in *The New Zealand Herald* (Fox, 2006) do illustrate the global nature of educational debates about boys and point to the strong similarities between the discourses discussed above and those articulated here in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Baker’s remarks can be positioned within the ‘poor boys’ discourse when he describes the institutional response to the ‘boy question’ as one of “denial, delay and trivialisation” claiming that “many in the Ministry of Education are stuck fighting the “girls can do anything battle” and suggesting that efforts to ensure that girls have equal access to education may have “gone too far”. He thus positions boys as having lost out to girls and as the group that is now disadvantaged. While no national review on the scale envisaged by Dr Baker has occurred, a number of reports, books with advice about raising boys and their educational achievements, and research articles in academic journals have appeared since the late 1990s. Some of the more populist literature echoes Dr Baker’s comments while an analysis of others reveals varying positions within the dominant discourses. It is important, at this point, to take into account Anne-Marie O’Neill’s comment that “there is some academic publishing in this area but it cannot be said that a solid, theoretically-informed ongoing body of work has emerged” (2005, p. 87).

As early as 1991 David Fergusson of the Christchurch Child Development Study, a longitudinal study of a birth cohort of 1265 New Zealand children, was questioning

whether girls were disadvantaged at school. In 1997, along with John Horwood he published 'Gender Differences in Educational Achievement in a New Zealand Birth Cohort' in which, based on an examination of standardised tests, teacher assessments and school leaving outcomes from the point of school entry to the age of 18, they reached the conclusion "that the traditional educational disadvantage shown by females has largely disappeared and has been replaced by an emerging male disadvantage" (p. 83). Boys 'underachievement' is attributed to their "disruptive and inattentive classroom behaviours that appeared to impede male learning" (p. 83). Seemingly, they did not consider the relationships between schooling and factors such as social class, race, ethnicity, dis/ability, or sexuality to identify *which* of the boys are more, or less, disadvantaged. As well as positioning *all* boys as disadvantaged there appears to be an inference that the emerging male disadvantage is a sign that boys are in some way 'losing out' to girls. Weaver-Hightower (2003) describes this as treating gender issues as a kind of 'zero-sum game' where attending to one group takes the attention away from the other. Fergusson & Horwood's 1991 work is indicative of the ways that the three discourses, 'poor boys', 'failing schools' and 'boys will be boys', pervade some academic writing that focuses on the question of boys and their schooling.

A noticeably more measured approach is apparent in the review of research literature on gender differences in compulsory education commissioned by the Curriculum Division of the Ministry of Education in 1999. Authors Adrienne Alton-Lee and Angelique Praat avoid simplistic generalisations in their review of more than 450 national and international studies. Their awareness of the limitations of the more populist discourses means that they instead paint a complex, nuanced picture by structuring the report around seven areas of the curriculum. The rationale for this approach is an acknowledgement that "knowledge itself has been imbued with gendered associations through its organisation within disciplinary and curricula areas" (p. 1). This enables them to highlight differences in the achievements of boys

and girls from one curriculum area to another. For example, while girls were shown to achieve more highly in literacy, boys achieved more highly in social studies. According to Alton-Lee and Praat (2000) areas of the curriculum positioned as feminine, such as literacy and the arts, were resisted by boys while technology education, a then newly enhanced area of economic significance, proved to be “a site where traditionally gendered curriculum divisions are confounded” (Abstract, para. 3). More marked disparities were revealed when factors such as socioeconomic status and ethnicity were considered with pupils, both male and female, from poorer backgrounds achieving less well and Māori and Pacific pupils, and especially Māori boys, achieving poorly. Interestingly, John Hattie, University of Auckland, in an address to the Association of Boys’ Schools of New Zealand Conference in Wellington in May 2010, based on his meta- analysis of over 50,000 studies, involving more than 240 million students, investigating influences on student achievement, concluded that the any differences favouring girls over boys in achievement in Aotearoa New Zealand schools are small to negligible and:

the effects fall into insignificance compared to ethnic and class differences. The “new disadvantaged” are not boys, but those from less resourced homes, from Māori and Pacific families. Note, also the common claim about Māori boys seems misplaced when it is Māori and Pacific (boys and girls) that are disadvantaged in our school system (p. 11).

Bob Lingard (2003) argues that the move to self-managing schools in Australia has been accompanied by a weakening of central policy making especially with regard to “feminist and pro-feminist framed gender equity policies” (p. 43). In practical terms this means schools, influenced by media hyperbole and anxiety about boys’ schooling, turn to popular reports and books to fill the vacuum especially when it comes to staff professional development. It could be argued that perceptions, such as those expressed at conferences on boys’ education by Paul Baker that official responses to concerns about boys in Aotearoa New Zealand amount to denial or

trivialisation rather than the formulation of specific policy making, result in schools relying on the more populist literature. This was certainly the case in one school where I worked on a research project ⁴(Ferguson, 2012). This allows local books by authors such as Michael Irwin (2009) and Celia Lashlie (2005) and two reports from the Education Review Office, in the words of Weaver-Hightower (2008), in effect to “become a kind of policy” (p. 11).

The Education Review Office (ERO) has produced two reports that focus on the issue of boys’ achievement. In 1999 *The Achievement of Boys* appeared, to be followed in 2000 with *Promoting Boys’ Achievement*. Whilst the first report concentrates on secondary schooling and relies on statistical data to demonstrate that girls are outperforming boys, the second is based on ERO reviews of 416 primary, intermediate, composite and secondary schools and provides specific ideas on how schools can address the evidence that boys are educationally disadvantaged. Both reports position boys within several of the dominant discourses but most notably draw on the economic imperative of the ‘failing schools’ discourse:

Failure to address under achievement has on-going consequences for both the underachiever themselves and society as a whole (2000, p. 1).

New Zealand’s future economic prosperity and social cohesion depend on giving all students (boys as well as girls) the opportunity to succeed to their full potential (1999, p. 8).

The ‘poor boys’ discourse is evident in comments such as:

Most teachers are women. It is argued that some schools place a greater emphasis on feminine values and that teachers adopt teaching styles and assessment practices that favour girls over boys (1999, p. 9).

To address boys’ under-achievement, consideration may need to be given to increasing the number of men in teaching and the number of male role models in schools (1999, p. 11).

⁴ Frequent references were made to Steve Biddulph’s work by the School staff.

In an attempt to avoid presenting boys (and girls) as a unitary category and to show how success at school is affected by other factors such as class we read this muted qualification:

Not all boys (or girls) conform to gender types. While more boys than girls experience failure at school, not all boys do. Despite overall improvements in the achievement of girls, some girls continue to achieve poorly. Gender needs to be seen in the context of other factors affecting achievement such as ability, socio-economic status and the level of family support (1999, p. 7).

These ideas are not explored more fully and the documents are silent on the role of variables such as race and ethnicity in affecting achievement at school. Ringrose (2007) describes a shortcoming such as this as a failure to understand and adequately articulate how gender is “differentiated by other forms of difference” (p. 480) such as inequalities based on social, class, race and ethnicity and in effect to decontextualize schooling experiences. The ERO report (1999, p. 7) goes on to assert that underachievement is more significant for boys thereby reducing the debate to one of competing claims as to which group is the more disadvantaged.

Although Irwin’s *Educating Boys* (2009) and Lashlie’s *He’ll Be OK* (2005) are aimed at a general audience, in his chapter summaries Irwin addresses remarks directly to teachers and Lashlie’s work follows on from the ‘Good Man Project’, which she describes as “loose (very loose) action research” (p. 22) conducted in boys’ secondary schools and reported widely in Aotearoa New Zealand. From the outset Irwin, senior lecturer at the Massey University Institute of Education, positions boys within the ‘at risk’ discourse:

The last two decades have seen boys released into society with few boundaries and little guidance, to float aimlessly in the wind like balloons. Some are lucky and soar, but many will become tangled, others self-destruct, while others lose all sense of direction and bounce around (p. 13).

Interestingly, this seems to echo Steve Biddulph's summation of what he calls the 'male situation': "boys are often adrift in life, failing at school, awkward in relationships, at risk for violence, alcohol and drugs and so on" (1997, p. 1). Irwin continues the theme by describing communities as hazardous for boys who are vulnerable to drink, illicit drugs, death at an early age, or ending up in prison. Lashlie, a former prison officer with experience working in a male prison and a self-styled social commentator, who is frequently called upon by the media to comment on issues related to boys, describes herself as anxious to prevent young men going to prison and she too continues the theme of their vulnerability when she laments "we seem to lose far too many of our young men to suicide, to prison and to death on the roads" (p. 14) and "there were moments during the project when their vulnerability washed over me and I found myself wondering how we actually manage to get so many of them safely through to manhood (p. 63). The 'boys will be boys' discourse is also evident in both of these books. "Boys can't help being boys; they are 'hardwired' to develop certain masculine qualities" writes Irwin (p. 10) while Lashlie comments "the answer to things that worry us most about our boys lies in recognising who they are rather than in trying to make them who they're not" (p. 14) and frames her project as a search for "the essence of being male" (p. 17).

A significant shortcoming in their work is their failure to recognize differences and diversity amongst any group of boys. Irwin starts out promisingly, "boys are also very diverse and have a wide range of likes, beliefs and feelings" but continues "so when I use the term 'boys' throughout this book, I'm referring to what the large majority of boys think or do" (p. 11). He justifies this generality with the fact that 90% of the boys he talked to listed sport as the activity they most liked. Despite professing to have listened to the opinions and ideas of hundreds of boys, he does not seem to have heard all of them or at least he fails to report them in all their diversity. Although titling his book *Helping Kiwi boys to succeed at school*, by ignoring 10% of them there is a risk that his advice to teachers will simply reinforce

rather than challenge the dominant hegemony about what it means to be a boy. Lashlie fails to acknowledge any diversity amongst adolescent boys and when she does differentiate on the basis of age she simply reports the characteristics of boys at different developmental stages as though all the boys at each stage are entirely homogeneous.

Martino, Kehler and Weaver-Hightower draw on the work of Deborah Britzman to describe this failure to differentiate, this propensity of populist texts to homogenize boys, as an “impulse to normalize” (2009, p. xii). What these texts (and the media) do is to insert “male subjects into a certain ‘game of truth’ a normalizing regime in which their gender differences are relative to those of the opposite sex” (Martino & Kehler, 2006 p. 120). Irwin’s and Lashlie’s texts, their ‘truths’ about boys, completely ignore the ways that factors, such as class, race, ethnicity dis/ability or sexuality, might impact on schoolboys’ subjectivities. This veritable lacuna was apparent in Lashlie’s recollections of her interactions with boys where she was oblivious to their heteronormativity. She played upon the boys fears of homosexuality by saying that, in answer to the question about prisons ‘is it dangerous to bend over for the soap in the shower?’ she “answered a very emphatic ‘Yes’ to the soap question — in my view, any deterrent to prison is a good deterrent” (p. 31). She also blithely writes that if the soap question was not asked by the boys, she both asked and answered the question herself. Further, when she noticed and asked the boys why they used homophobic language to insult their mates, she allowed the comment “Cos it’s the *worst* thing you could be, Miss” (p. 130, my emphasis) to go unexamined. Storylines such as these insert boys into a normalizing regime that both constitutes and valorises ‘real boys’ as heterosexuals. Left unproblematised such discursive ‘truths’ about boys, and men, limit their possible subjectivities and serve to perpetuate a compulsory, hegemonic, heterosexual masculinity. The homophobic comments, which Lashlie portrays as virtual “terms of endearment”, that appeared in the boys’ conversations and formed a part of this discursive regime actually act as a form of

surveillance through which the boys police their own behaviour and that of their peers. Thus, schools relying on these populist texts to guide their practices especially with reference to gender issues do not have access to an analysis of this sort with which to interrogate, understand and address the role their institution and their pedagogical practices play in the legitimating and perpetuating of dominant heterosexual masculinity.

Lashlie, by describing herself as a feminist (a liberal feminist) which she defines as “the right of women to pursue whatever path they choose without in any way being restricted by their gender” (p. 11), does not appear to be drawing on the anti-feminist discourse that blames the Women’s Movement for social changes resulting in men being deeply unhappy and disconnected from their essential selves (Biddulph, 1997). However, she does maintain that the gains for women, their advancements, have been won at the cost of men — the ‘zero-sum game’ argument that if women are ‘winners’ men must be ‘losers’. At other times, citing the negative portrayal of men and boys in advertising campaigns, she argues that men are undervalued and that they, along with boys, are insecure about of their place in contemporary society. In doing so she is positioning boys and schooling issues within some wider ‘crisis of masculinity’ which is often a feature of the ‘at risk’ discourse that Michael Kehler (2009) says positions boys as needing to be saved.

The context for the ‘masculine crisis’ is said to have resulted from economic changes and shifts in the workforce across the world (Weaver-Hightower, 2009). Certainly there have been changes in labour market patterns in Aotearoa New Zealand with a decline in manufacturing since the 1950s when young men could leave school without any qualifications and find employment in unskilled, manual labouring jobs (Allen, 2009). Many of my contemporaries in the 1960s, especially boys from working class backgrounds, left school as unqualified 15 year-olds to take up apprenticeships in manufacturing industries where they then gained their

qualifications while on the job. With fewer unskilled jobs available now, boys are forced to stay at school longer and their achievements have become more visible in the neoliberal era of high-stakes testing. At the same time the number of jobs in the service sector has expanded. These jobs require skills of empathy, interpersonal relationships and good communication which are qualities traditionally positioned as feminine. But do these changes, together with the advances for women alluded to by Lashlie (2005), amount to a 'crisis of masculinity' and can it be said that boys' schooling issues, particularly their scholastic achievements relative to girls, is a symptom of this crisis?

While 21st century Aotearoa New Zealand is a very different society from that of the 1970s when the second wave of feminism emerged as an important force for social change, and while the roles of men and women continue to change and evolve, recent figures from The Human Rights Commission Te Kāhui Tika Tangata (<http://www.hrc.co.nz/>) and Statistics New Zealand Tatauranga Aotearoa (<http://www.stats.govt.nz/>) do not support the argument that men are undervalued, in crisis, and losing out to women. Whatever the small difference favouring females over males in achievement in Aotearoa New Zealand schools (Hattie, 2010), it soon disappears in the post-school environment. In 2012 the average hourly wage for men was \$29.09 while for women it was \$25.12. However, young women aged 15 – 24 years earned a third less than young men with men taking home \$600 per week and women only \$384. Sixty-two per cent of law graduates are women but only 17% of partners in large law firms are women. Only 12% of Queen's or senior Counsels are women and only 26% of judges are women. In education 74% of teachers are women but only 49% of principals are women and less than 25% of senior academics in universities are women. The 2011 parliament was made up of 121 members but only 39 were women and only 30% of the cabinet were female. Only 24.3% of directors in Aotearoa New Zealand boardrooms are female and only 12.8% of chairpersons are women. Perhaps these broad statistics mask the situation for different groups of men

but proponents of the masculine crisis fail to differentiate preferring to express it in generalities.

Anne-Marie O'Neill (2005) reiterates Bev James and Kay Saville-Smith's 1989 description of Aotearoa New Zealand as a gendered culture; one in which the basic structures and social relationships are constructed around gender differences which are understood as 'natural'. The origins of this are said to lie in our history as a colonial society which I will discuss more fully in the next chapter when I explore frontier masculinities and anti-intellectualism. Raewyn Connell (2002) argues that in gendered societies, where men predominate in public as leaders, managers and authority figures in politics, business and commerce and as entrepreneurs, all men, including marginalised groups and those actively against the subordination of women, receive a benefit from what she describes as the 'patriarchal dividend'. She does acknowledge that not all men benefit equally but at the macro level she argues that to some extent because of the power, privilege and prestige that accrues to leaders in an increasingly globalizing world, there is the potential for all men to derive some benefit from these unequal gender relations.

Paul Connolly makes a very astute observation in his 2004 consideration of the debates about boys and schooling when he comments that what is missing from the key 'explanations' for the lower educational achievement of boys "is a focus on masculinity itself as appropriated and expressed by boys in school" (p. 31-32). He identifies masculinity as the key factor needing to be addressed in terms of boys' 'underachievement' but is careful to note that "there are masculinities and not just one masculinity and that these need to be understood in terms of the specific social and structural contexts within which they are developed" (p. 61) in order to understand their differing impacts on boys' attitudes to education. Similarly, Francis and Skelton (2005) note that the three discourses originally identified by Debbie Epstein *et al.* (1998) position the explanations for boys 'underachievement' as

external to boys themselves whether it be poor teaching, the feminized curriculum or the wider societal 'crisis in masculinity' — Connolly (2004) states that the exception to this is the explanation that the origin of boys' poor academic performance is to be found in their laddish behaviour. Jackson maintains that "concerns about schoolboy 'laddish' anti-learning and/or anti-school cultures ... remain pervasive in education discourses today" (2010 p. 505). She describes the link between laddishness and underachievement as a 'simplistic coupling' arguing that "not all 'laddish' boys are 'underachievers' and not all 'underachievers' are 'laddish'" (2006, p. xii) and further that concerns about laddish pupils also need to encompass the ways in which laddish behaviour by some boys can actually obstruct the progress in school of some girls who are unwittingly subjected to it.

Within the Aotearoa New Zealand context, researchers have made similar remarks about what is lacking with the increased focus on boys and their schooling. Adrienne Alton-Lee and Angelique Praat (2000) maintain that "in particular, there are substantial vacuums in our understandings of masculinities, femininities, cultures and identities in New Zealand" (p. 12) and that "there is a need for substantial research tracing the links between the gendered regimes of the wider society and those that work in our schools" (p. 29). They conclude their literature review with the acknowledgment that "most of the research reviewed was derived from international contexts. The critical role of specific cultural contexts in producing positions of masculinity and femininity suggest that to address gendered behaviour, local classroom-based research is required to inform practice" (p. 291). Louisa Allen (2009) argues that relying on statistical data and claiming disadvantage for boys is to focus on only part of the picture. She endorses O'Neill's 2005 contention that a better understanding of the notion of disadvantage requires moving beyond the debates about statistics of girls' versus boys' achievements to a rigorous examination "of the nature of masculinity along with the processes, rituals,

practices and dispositions through which boys and men ‘make’ themselves (that is, attain a gendered identity within a distinctly gendered culture)” (p. 99).

This research project reported in this thesis was undertaken with the aim of making a useful contribution to the debates about boys and their schooling, especially in the Aotearoa New Zealand context, by exploring how two small groups of young boys ‘do boy’, construct and enact their masculinities in their respective schooling contexts.. The next chapter outlines the theoretical frameworks that inform my work including poststructuralist feminism and aspects of queer theory. The challenging writings of Michel Foucault proved instructive in framing understandings of notions of discourse, power and knowledge. Selected works of Foucault are explored including the notion of the body as the materialization of discourse. The second chapter also includes a discussion of embodiment and the role of the body in the construction of gender. These alternative theoretical perspectives, as opposed to developmental approaches, were selected with the hope of being able to access new ways of understanding teaching, learning and children. I particularly wanted to explore how children collectively develop their understandings of gender in their everyday interactions in their schooling contexts.

Chapter three outlines the methodology and the methods chosen for the study. It begins with a brief look at qualitative research from a feminist poststructuralist perspective. I then outline case study research, ethical approval procedures and how I selected and gained access to the two case study schools. The research settings are described along with the various methods used in these settings to produce the data including focus groups, classroom observations and video recording, children’s drawings, and finally, playground observations. The participants are also introduced briefly and the chapter concludes with an outline of my approach to data analysis.

Chapter four delves into the children's use of discourses to construct their understanding of themselves as boys and girls during our focus group discussions. The focus groups were inspired by Bronwyn Davies' (1989, 1993) use of feminist stories and talking with young children as a way of exploring "the processes through which our maleness and our femaleness are established and maintained during childhood" (1993, p. 1). I sought to re/create the everyday experience of talking, thinking and reading our way through two feminist tales that depicted the gender-transgressive behaviour of two boys, William in *William's Doll* by Charlotte Zolotow (1972), and Steven in *Jump!* by Michelle Magorian (1994). The data analysis highlights the fluidity and ambiguity in the children's understandings of gender and the dynamic way in which gender is socially, politically and relationally constituted in the particular context of focus group discussions.

Chapter five is centred on the children as embodied beings investigating how bodies are implicated in the construction, negotiation and performance of gender when governed by classroom rules, routines and rituals. It focuses on what happens to pupils' bodies as they strive to fashion their subjectivities through 'technologies of the self' within the expected, powerful norms of the classroom. The analysis reveals considerable variation in the ways the seven boys comport themselves, at times by corralling their movements and at other times undermining the enforcement of classroom norms, 'out-voicing' girls (Francis, 2005). I suggest that this calls into question the postfeminist discourse that assumes that equality has been achieved for girls and that feminist concerns in education are no longer relevant.

The sixth chapter concentrates on the children's playground experiences and how gender is constructed, maintained and experienced in a school setting of reduced adult surveillance. In analysing the gendered playground discourses I focus on the ways that for some children these discourses re/produce stereotypical and limiting

ways of being and what happens for those children who seek to disrupt these dominant discourses.

The final chapter draws together the various strands of the analysis and considers their implications. It reflects on the usefulness of the theoretical frames of feminist poststructuralism and queer theory as ways of understanding the complexities involved in the dynamic processes through which children constitute their gendered subjectivities in and out of school classrooms. I reflect on some of the difficulties and failures I encountered in trying to think otherwise about teaching, learning and children and consider some possible ways forward with a view to enhancing both social and academic outcomes for boys.

Chapter 2

The Theoretical Perspectives of the Research

Theory without research is mere speculation; research without theory is mere data collection (Davidson & Tolich, 1999, p. 17)

The question of whether or not a position is right, coherent, or interesting, is in this case, less informative than why it is we come to occupy and defend the territory we do, what it promises us, from what it promises to protect us (Butler, 1995, p. 127–128).

This chapter outlines the theoretical frameworks that inform this exploration of how masculinities are understood and the processes through which they are constituted and negotiated in the schooling experiences of a group of young primary school boys. Where the popular rhetoric on boys and their schooling relies on biological, essentialist or socialization explanations of gender differences, I draw on queer theory and the work of Michel Foucault to employ a poststructuralist feminist approach to the examination of the boys' experiences of being schooled. The limitations of biological and socialization theories of gender are briefly discussed leading to an outline of the important philosophical concepts of poststructural feminism—language, discourse, knowledge, power and subjectivity—and how they can be used to come to a better understanding of the processes of schooling (St. Pierre, 2000). After exploring the relevant aspects of Foucault's work that elucidate these philosophical concepts, the chapter moves on to an examination of the role of the body, in part as a materialization of discourses, and its significance in the processes of schooling and education. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the usefulness of queer theory to the research project especially how this perspective enables an understanding of "how gender is created, taken up, and performed through" (Blaise, 2005, p. 55) discourses of heterosexuality.

Biological and Socialization Theories of Gender

Biologically based explanations of gender difference argue that males and females are essentially and unalterably different because of bodily differences. Behavioural differences are then said to result from the nature of these differing genetic and hormonal compositions and occur through a universal masculine or feminine essence. This conservative position concludes that men and women are not equal because they are born different. Apologists for this doctrine claim that schools fail boys when they do not take boys' 'core masculinity' into account. Mindy Blaise (2005), while acknowledging that biology cannot be dismissed entirely, outlines a number of weaknesses with these explanations. Firstly, she notes that experimental data from work done with rats and monkeys in laboratories, on which biological determinism depends, cannot be used as the basis for decision making by classroom teachers. Secondly, she observes that variations that we see regularly within the sexes, for instance, 'tomboys' and 'girly girls', 'macho boys', and 'sissy boys', would not occur if differences were embedded in biology alone. Finally, Blaise (2005) argues that if identity is fixed by biology, rapid social change in society, such as young children being cared for by men at home and women working full-time outside the home, cannot be adequately explained.

Socialization theories, the idea that boys and girls take up social messages about suitable gender roles from interactions with the family, schools and the media, was an account of gender differences that was popular with second-wave feminists thirty or more years ago (Skelton & Francis, 2009). It appealed because gender differences were seen to be constructed socially rather than determined biologically. However, children were positioned as passively soaking up ideas rather like sponges and these ideas, according to Skelton and Francis (2009), amount to perpetuations of stereotypical ways of being male *or* female. Because of this it has been argued that many social constructionist accounts of gender "rely on a residual biological

essentialism" (Alsop *et al.* 2002, p. 65) by not adequately explaining how different forms of masculinity and femininity emerge, how change can occur over the lifespan of individuals or why resistance movements such as feminisms happen. As Blaise (2005) points out, in this theory there is no explanation of how society values being either a boy or a girl, what affect this might have for individuals and also absent is any analysis of power.

The Promise of Poststructural Feminism

Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre, in her outline of poststructural feminism in education which could justifiably be described as a *tour de force* due to its scholarly, comprehensive and comprehensible exposition of complex and challenging ideas, explains how poststructuralism can be utilized:

the poststructural critiques described in this essay can be employed to examine any commonplace situation, any ordinary event or process, in order to think differently about that occurrence – to open up what seems “natural” to other possibilities (2000, p. 479).

After a forty career in education, including more than twenty years as a primary school teacher, I needed a way of looking afresh at the everyday world of schooling. I was steeped in classroom traditions, routines, rituals and the practices of schooling; patrolling school playgrounds was all too familiar territory for me. Although I could in no way shed these experiences, I needed a way of stepping back and looking anew, if not askance, at what was so recognizable to me. Poststructural feminism beckoned for this perspective offered an alternative lens through which to view the world of the primary school in the hope of producing new knowledge through making use of poststructural conceptualizations of language, discourse, power, knowledge and subjectivity. According to Mindy Blaise (2005), poststructuralism becomes feminist when gender issues and a commitment to bringing about change

are of principal significance. Notwithstanding the fact that Foucault did not engage directly with issues of gender in his work, many poststructural feminist writers cite his writings (Davies, 1993, 2003; Pillow, 2000; St. Pierre, 2000; McLeod, 2001; Keddie, 2005; Renold, 2005). I too engage with many of his insightful ideas especially his theorizing of the complex interrelationships between *knowledge*, *power* and *discourse* and his notions of *governmentality* and *technologies of the self* as ways of exploring how boys (and girls) develop their understandings of gender in their schooling experiences. A Foucauldian approach is also useful in exploring how the boys individually and collectively learn to regulate themselves and others so as to successfully embody their masculinities in their efforts at becoming intelligible subjects (Youdell, 2006; Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2003).

Language

Poststructuralist thinking posits that meaning and knowledge are constituted through language; that we come to know ourselves, our social world and our place(s) in that world through language. Analysis or ‘deconstruction’ of language in feminist poststructural thinking aims to reveal the ways in which language works “to produce very real, material, and damaging structures in the world (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 481). For example, St. Pierre refers to Foucault’s archaeological analysis of how binaries have been constructed and how the first term in binaries such as mind/body, rational/irrational and culture/nature is associated with males, privileged and accordingly works to the disadvantage of women. Maggie MacLure (2003) maintains that in starting educational research from this perspective “you have to *suspend your belief in the innocence of words and the transparency of language as a window on an objectively graspable reality*” (2003, p. 12 original italics). A starting point for my investigation would be the awareness that meaning is not fixed but re/created so words such as ‘boy’ and ‘girl’ mean different things to different people at different times. As a researcher I would have to be attentive to these multiple

meanings and to how their use, and in particular the binary boy/girl, might be put to 'work' and in whose interests. In other words if language is understood as not being transparent but rather it is seen as potentially being both constraining and enabling, attending to its use would be an appropriate place to begin an investigation into the children's gendered schooling experiences.

Discourse, Knowledge, Power and Subjectivity

... history serves to show how that-which-is has not always been; i.e., that the things that seem most evident to us are always formed in the confluence of encounters and chances, during the course of a precarious and fragile history. What reason perceives as its necessity, or rather, what different forms of rationality offer as their necessary being, can perfectly well be shown to have a history; and the network of contingencies from which it emerges can be traced (Foucault, 1983/1988, p. 37).

As the above quotation shows, Foucault wanted his works to be unsettling and hence their appeal for me as I sought in my project to unsettle familiar territory and question that which is often taken for granted. Foucault's ideas are particularly instructive in explaining, after Nietzsche, the workings of the complex interrelationships between *knowledge*, *power* and *discourse*. His analysis is useful in revealing how our subjectivities, our understandings of ourselves as, for example, boys and girls or men and women, our understandings of others, and our positions in our worlds, come into being. For Foucault, an important outcome of this was to try to reach an understanding of the material effects that are at work in the production of these subjectivities and their consequences in terms of an intricate interplay of cultural, social and economic forces that are brought to bear on those who occupy the differing subject positions (Foucault, 1977/1980, 1971/1981).

A discourse, in the Foucauldian sense, is a body of knowledge that structures the way we think, the way we form our social relationships and how we construct our

understandings of ourselves and our relationships to the world (1969/2006).

Discourses, as a way of speaking and a way of thinking, are available in particular social contexts such as school classroom and playgrounds. Some of these discourses may be contradictory and may be unstable in that they may vary across time requiring an awareness of history in their analysis. These discourses create subject positions within which individuals are positioned or through which they position themselves as they negotiate the available and perhaps competing discourses.

Discourses are more than groups of symbols or signs that name the world. They “are practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak (Foucault, 1969/2006, p. 54) and Foucault saw an important role for himself with regard to discourse in showing people that:

they are much freer than they feel, that people accept as truth, as evidence , some themes which have been built up at a certain moment during history, and that this so-called evidence can be criticized and destroyed (Martin, 1988, p. 10).

In effect, the gender discourses we accept as true and fixed reflections of our social worlds, of our reality, are constructs that may in fact be partial, ambiguous and contradictory. Understanding how discourses work, particularly in a school setting, illustrates well how gender is socially constructed, resisted and negotiated.

Importantly, for this project, there is recognition that school children are not passive in this process, they actively construct their subjectivities through discourse, and also they do have a degree of agency in the processes of negotiating competing discourses.

It was in 1976, in *La Volonté de Savoir/The Will to Knowledge*, that Foucault outlined his ideas about the nature of the relationships between power, knowledge and discourse when he stated “indeed, it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together” (1976/1998, p. 100). He goes on to caution that we should not fall into

thinking of available discourses as being made up of dominant discourses and dominated discourses “but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies” (p. 100). A genealogical analysis would therefore focus on the normative practices arising from, not only what is said and what is censored, but also on the compulsory statements and those prohibited while continuously paying close attention to “who is speaking, his position of power” as well as “the institutional context in which he happens to be situated” (p. 100). It is through such an analysis that we can begin to understand how, for some children, certain subject positions, such as the ‘sporty boy’, come to be privileged and normalized and represent for them the most powerful way of ‘doing boy’ in that particular context.

An important task for a Foucauldian genealogy, as well as its being an historical means of inquiring into how we come to think about the self nowadays thereby questioning the notion of a single universal subject in history, for example the emergence of the rational subject of humanism, is to reveal the workings of power through discursive practices. Foucault (1976/1998) has laid out his own idiosyncratic notion of power in five key propositions. Firstly, power is not a commodity, something that is possessed rather; “power is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations” (p. 94). In order to understand the processes of power it is necessary to examine how it works day-to-day especially to realize its material effects. Secondly, power relations are mobile, intertwined with other types of relationships such as economic, sexual and knowledge relations. Significantly, the functioning of power relations is not “merely a role of prohibition or accompaniment; they have a directly productive role wherever they come into play” (p. 94). Thirdly, “power comes from below” (p. 94) and circulates in a capillary fashion throughout society in the commonplace interactions and everyday practices of institutions such as the family, and the education system as well as in the practices of powerful elites in spheres of global politics and international businesses. It is

therefore multi-directional, operating through a grid or network. Fourthly, “there is no power that is exercised without a series of aims or objectives” (p. 95) although there may well be obscurity in its discursive functioning in that there is no one to whom the intentions can be attributed or who lays claim to their invention. Fifthly, and crucially for the concept of an agentic subject, for Foucault, “where there is power, there is resistance” (p. 95) and the emergence of resistant discourses at a variety of points within the networks of power, can be empowering for different groupings of people. Interestingly, he advocates using these points of resistance as starting points “to bring to light power relations, locate their position, find out their point of application and the methods used” (Foucault, 1982, p. 211). By exploring how relations of power work in different school settings, from the public and semiprivate worlds of the classrooms (Nuthall, 2007) to corridors and playgrounds, it should be possible to come to understand how gendered social hierarchies are re/produced and challenged. As will be discussed later, one of the case study boys occupied multiple subject positions. He used his knowledge of Pokémon to gain kudos among his peers and was able to depict himself powerfully as a Pokémon character in his drawings but in the playground other boys belittled and laughed at his imaginary play.

In a 1976 lecture, delivered on 14 January, Foucault explored a theme essential to his work, namely the knotty problem of *pouvoir-savoir*, the important nexus between power and knowledge, and its disciplinary effects. He contended that, in any given society, there are multiple relations of power and that their maintenance depends upon “the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse” (1977/1980, p. 93). He goes on to argue that power cannot be exercised without ‘discursive formations’ which embody what the society takes to be true and that “we are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth” (1977/1980, p. 93). Knowledge and truth then are bound up with power in that our mode of being, what is possible, the

episteme is dependent upon the true discourses which are the carriers of the particular outcomes of power. In this sense 'truths' do not embody universal values but are the products of mechanisms of power, and power and knowledge do not exist separately from each other. They are mutually interdependent, each producing the other.

Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its régime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true ... (1977/1980, p. 131).

One of Foucault's most significant contributions was to show how these régimes of truth function, within a given culture and its discursive practices, to normalize the conduct of its subjects. He utilizes the ideas of 'disciplinary power' and 'disciplinary technology' through a study of prisons (Foucault, 1977/1979 & 1977/1980a) to show how individuals govern their own conduct in accordance with acceptable norms. Jeremy Bentham's model of a central tower or panopticon from which prison guards have the facility to observe every prison cell at all times so that the inmates, unaware of whether they are being observed or not, modify their behaviour as if they were under constant surveillance becomes a metaphor for the 'free' individual in society. Under the gaze of the state, through its institutions such as schools, hospitals and factories and through its scientific discourses such as medicine and psychiatry, bodies are subjected to disciplinary techniques to the extent that self-surveillance comes in to play. We begin to control our own conduct, our practices, in keeping with the expectations perceived to operate within these institutions and knowledge systems that are themselves reflections of the discursive practices that make up and circulate throughout social life. Foucault thereby elucidates for us another important facet of the connections between power, knowledge and discourse.

It is through discourse that power and knowledge are entwined. Particular forms of knowledge are established, denied and resisted through the operation of discourse. Powerful forces shape our subjectivities. Regulated by the discourses we encounter, we modify our practices, attitudes and beliefs in accordance with their dictates or conversely renounce their truths, sometimes at considerable cost, by transgressing accepted norms. In this manner, we are simultaneously the products of discourses and an important component in the expression of particular discourses. Foucault then enjoins us with the idea that discourses do not, in and of themselves, tell us what tactics they originate from, what ideologies they stand for or what moral imperatives they evoke. Instead, he advocates that we interrogate them on two levels:

Their tactical productivity (what reciprocal effects of power and knowledge they ensure) and their strategical integration (what conjunction and what force relationship make their utilization necessary in a given episode of the various confrontations that occur) (1976/1998, p. 102).

His concern is not so much with origins and causes but with coming to understand how, in a given historical period, a particular discourse may have arisen and come to exert a hold over people. It is contingency with which he is concerned since history results from chance events and accidents rather than a guiding hand or a grand design:

it is to identify the accidents, the minute deviations —or conversely, the complete reversals—the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us; it is to discover that truth or being do not lie at the root of what we know and what we are, but the exteriority of accidents (Foucault, 1971/1977, p. 146).

Contingency, in the Foucauldian sense, disavows the inevitable and refers to the appearance of an event or phenomena that was not essential but results from the complex interactions between a whole series of other events. It is by compiling such “*wirkliche Histoire/effective history*” that Foucault fulfils what he sees as the role of the intellectual:

it is, through the analyses that he carries out in his own field, to question over and over again what is postulated as self-evident, to disturb people’s mental habits, the way they do and think things, to dissipate what is familiar and accepted, to re-examine rules and institutions...(Foucault, 1984/1988, p. 265).

Governmentality and Technologies of the Self

Foucault’s theorizing about *governmentality* is an important aspect of his wider concerns with how subjects are formed, regulated and governed (Danaher, *et al.* 2000). He set out his ideas in lectures given during the 1970s most notably in a lecture on the issue of government given at the Collège de France in February 1978 (Foucault, 1978/1991). For Foucault, government concerned more than politics in that he posed questions of government in relation to many aspects of society: “how to govern oneself, how to be governed, how to govern others, by whom the people will accept being governed, how to become the best possible governor” (Foucault, 1978/1991, p. 87). His questions therefore focus, on the one hand, on political concerns of the state and, on the other hand, on how we conduct our personal lives and it is of interest to this research project that Foucault specifically refers to the government of children and the “problematic of pedagogy” (1978/1991, p. 87).

Colin Gordon (1991) describes Foucault as having both a wide and a narrow view of ‘governmental rationality’ or ‘governmentality’ (Gordon, 1991, p. 1). The wide view was evident in his earlier work when he used the term ‘les jeux de vérité /games of truth’ which he defined as “a set of rules by which truth is produced. It is not a game

in the sense of an amusement” (Foucault, 1984/ 1997, p. 297). His concern here was to understand how power operates through discourse within institutions, such as schools, to shape the behaviour of individuals. For Foucault institutions ‘speak the truth’ through their discursive practices and we are thus discursively positioned to see the ‘truth’ about ourselves. In this sense subjectivity is posited as “the subject’s insertion into a ‘certain game of truth’” (Martino, 1999, p. 240). Foucault’s narrow sense of ‘government’ became the focus of his later works in which he focussed on the government of one’s self. This work contrasted with his earlier ideas on ‘the subject’ where he attributed meaning making to institutions, such as schools, rather than to people as free agents (Danaher *et al.* 2000). However with *technologies of the self*, Foucault’s attention shifted to individuals as active agents who worked on themselves by fashioning or regulating their bodies, their thoughts and their behaviour in order to ‘know themselves’ and to determine the truth about themselves (1984/1990). My research focus here, in utilizing Foucault’s concern with the process of subjection and resistance or the analysis of the constitution of the subject, mirrors that of Martino and Pallotta-Chiarolli (2003) in that it is concerned with how, through ‘technologies of the self, boys are actively involved in turning “themselves into certain kinds of gendered subjects” (p. 6). In my research I engage in an examination of how, through discourse, boys are learning how to shape not just themselves but also others and their circumstances as they fashion themselves into desirable, gendered ways of being.

Importantly, in Foucauldian thought, there is a materiality to discourse. Discourse does not remain at the level of theory but rather the “body is the materialization of discourse; it is a discursive formation” (Hokowhitu, 2012, p. 48) and “the corporeal manifestation of power” (*ibid* p. 49). Doing gender, or indeed undoing gender, involves bodily performances in and through space so that the body is not a stable biologically produced entity, instead it is constructed through discursive negotiation

“totally imprinted by history and the processes of history’s destruction of the body”
(Foucault, 1971/1977, p. 148).

Body Matters: Analysis and Re/presentation

Your soul is oftentimes a battlefield, upon which your reason and your judgement wage war against your passion and your appetite. Would that I could be the peacemaker in your soul, that I might turn the discord and the rivalry of your elements into oneness and melody. But how shall I, unless you yourselves be also the peacemakers, nay, the lovers of all your elements?
(Kahil Gibran)

In October 2009, I had the pleasure of experiencing the St. Lawrence String Quartet in concert for Chamber Music New Zealand. This foursome has performed together almost 2000 times, over a twenty-year period, and has built up an impressive reputation as a world-class ensemble being described by *The New Yorker* in 2001 as “remarkable not simply for their music-making, exalted as it is, but for the joy they take in the act of connection”. In the programme notes for the concert Geoff Nuttall, the first violinist, was quoted as describing his philosophy of performance thus:

Play every concert like it’s your last; every phrase like it’s the most important thing you’ve ever said... Remember that the only reason you’re there is to make people cry and sweat and shiver, and give them that incredible sense of creation happening before your eyes [ears]. That’s the [only] reason to play. Otherwise there’s no point.

At first, I thought I was going to be thoroughly distracted by Nuttall’s flamboyant gestures and the restless movements that seemed to accompany every note that he played. At times, both his feet left the floor and came down with clearly audible thuds. His whole body rocked back and forth and from side to side. However, instead of being disconcerted, I became both enthralled and excited by the intensity of his passionate playing. He appeared to wrap himself around his violin so that it

ceased to be an instrument and seemed to become a prosthetic extension of his sinewy body. The music emanated from his whole being and I was completely mesmerized by the physicality of his performance as he indeed played with every fibre of his being. It became clear that rather than his thoughts about performing music being merely cerebral, they had become embodied.

Thinking is undeniably embodied. The active, communicative body, motion, and physical movement interact. What communicative bodies are about is the sharing of others' embodied experience in their pleasure and happiness as well as their unease or suffering (O'Loughlin, 1998, p. 279).

This seems to me to be in stark contrast to the dominant Western intellectual tradition. Here, the body is seen to be of little or no account and thinking is regarded as a pure process that occurs in the mind alone. My immediate fascination with speculating about possible explanations for this restiveness in Nuttall's demeanour stemmed, in part, from a comment made during a recent meeting with my doctoral supervisors.

I had started to write my methodology chapter and it was pointed out to me that in doing so, notwithstanding my avowed poststructural feminist sensibilities, I had invoked Descartes' mind/body dualism whereby:

res cogitans—thinking substance, subjective experience, spirit consciousness, that which man perceives as within—was understood as fundamentally different and separate from *res extensa*— extended substance, the objective world, matter, the physical body, plants and animals, stones and stars, the entire physical universe, everything that man perceives as outside his mind (Tarnas, 1991, p. 277-278).

I had written about constructivism as a theoretical perspective on children's learning. In doing so I was drawing on the work of University of Canterbury

researchers, Graham Nuthall and Adrienne Alton-Lee (1990, 1994, 2000) whose 'Understanding Learning and Teaching Project' had been influential in my career as a primary school teacher for over twenty years and in my tertiary teaching as a lecturer in education working in pre-service teacher education for a period of sixteen years. Not only did the findings from their project influence my approach to teaching, which was considered progressive within an education system that was heavily influenced by behavioural approaches to teaching and learning, but such was the respect with which their work was regarded both nationally and internationally, that I had incorporated aspects of their research methodology into the research design of my current work. My comments about constructivism referred to learning as occurring when students constructed their own knowledge and that this process occurred in their minds as they engaged in classroom activities and tried to make sense of their own experiences. I distinctly remember being taught by Graham that a child's mind was like an incomplete jigsaw puzzle and that children's minds were active in the learning process in filling in the gaps with information they constructed as a result of the learning experiences we provided as their teachers.

Bringing into play the Cartesian mind/body split, as I had, matters in feminist theorizing in that ontologically there is a rejection of the binary ways of understanding reality especially the association of the mind and the rational with men, and the body and the irrational with women. This opposition and those of objectivity and subjectivity, science and nature, are "seen as both symbiotically related and necessary to each other *and* as existing in relations of super- and subordination, with the feminine supportive of the masculine (Stanley & Wise, 1993, p. 194). Iris Marion Young (1990) describes how, in the oppression of women, the body is implicated:

Women's oppression is most complexly tied to our bodies, because patriarchal culture gives women's bodies such variable meanings and submits

them to so many controls. From the dawn of the West's distinction between reason and body, women have been identified with the body and both feared and devalued as a result of that identification (p. 11).

I had first encountered this idea many years ago when I first encountered feminist theory by reading Simone de Beauvoir's world-famous study *The Second Sex* in which she distinguishes between gender and biological sex:

One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine (1972, p. 295).

I felt that I had embraced an understanding of how she had shed new light on the ways in which cultural meanings have come to be situated in the biological sexed body which then gave rise to distinct gendered behaviours that have no basis in the body. What I had failed to do was to go on to make connections between this and learning theory. In fact the realization slowly dawned that the learning theory on which I had based much of my practice was, in some way, supportive of "phallogentric forms of theoretical domination" (Grosz, 1987, p. 476). However, as has been pointed out very recently, with the exception of curriculum areas such as physical education and health, which are concerned with subjecting the body to healthy regimes of regular exercise and diet, in the main the body has been absent from educational theory, policy and curriculum discourses.

The body's presence as a flesh and blood, thinking, feeling, sentient, species being, a 'body with organs' whose very presence — moving, growing, changing over time — is generative of meaning potential to which the self and others must respond, has remained rather a shadowy presence (Evans, Davies & Rich, 2009, p. 392).

With the cornerstone of my educational philosophy seriously questioned I experienced two reactions. The first was that where once there had been *terra firma* there was now only shifting sands and the tremendous sense of uncertainty and loss that this generated, and the second reaction was that I was standing on the brink of a potentially exciting new discovery. But how was I to address the problem of the absence of the material body in educational theory and research? It was then, with considerable trepidation, that I began wrestling with the idea of bridging the gap between feminist theory situated “in and from the body” and traditional androcentric learning theory “that is rarely grounded in the body” (Kevin G. Davison, 2007, p. 16).

There is a visceral quality to young children’s learning. One only has to watch them at their play, which is the work of childhood and the chief mode of learning in the early years, to appreciate the bodily involvement in their learning. They throw themselves wholeheartedly, sometimes literally, into their activities be they kicking a ball around, skipping, playing tag, experimenting with sand and water, acting out superhero roles as part of fantasy play, building with natural materials such as pine needles or taking part in a complex, rule-governed, bat and ball game such as cricket. Like Geoff Nuttall, they celebrate life by playing with every fibre of their being as they live their lives in the present tense totally focused on the immediacy of the moment they are in and the activity with which they are presently occupying it which is in turn, the source of their learning. Early childhood teachers, who understand how young children go about their learning, incorporate play into the daily activities of their centres thereby maximising opportunities for children to co-construct their understandings of their worlds as they interact with people, places and things. There was a time when primary schools did the same especially in their junior classes using spontaneous play as an avenue into the more formal types of learning. But not anymore.

Caught up in the contemporary educational discourses and practices of the neoliberals with their emphasis on efficiency in managing learning and quality control in the form of quantifiable learning outcomes, schools, almost without exception, are forced to eschew the more holistic child-centred approaches to learning, which are the guiding principles behind the philosophy of teaching and learning characteristic of New Zealand early childhood centres, in favour of a more regimented, atomistic approach to curriculum. Although describing the current situation in universities, Robyn Barnacle's depiction of the learning that results can equally well be applied to primary schools:

Learning then becomes increasingly understood in terms of metrics: a process, in other words, of accumulation and acquisition of discrete knowledge objects, skills and competencies (2009, p. 23).

She goes on to argue that this rationalistic approach invokes a conception of a learner as a "rational mind presiding, hierarchically, over an inert body" and that "embodiment is not considered epistemologically important" (p. 23). When the body does come in to play in contemporary schooling it is as the object to be disciplined and controlled; a body to be tamed and ordered. Allison James (2000) develops this thesis in her consideration of children as embodied beings. She reflects on her own school photographs taken during the 1950s and the 1960s as illustrations of the schools' role in the controlling of bodies. Children are lined up in rows, carefully managed by size, with the tallest at the centre and each row neatly tapering to the right and left. Hands are held at the sides or for those sitting, usually the girls, their hands are clasped in laps while their feet are tidily placed together. My own favourite school photograph was an attempt to resist this ubiquitous discipline and regimentation.

I was teaching in a small country school and requested that my class be allowed to group themselves informally at the base of a large spreading tree. I seated myself in one of the lower branch and the children gathered around me. Despite its informality, as I look at it now, I see young bodies carefully contained and ordered. Two girls sit demurely on the ground in front, hands held together in their laps and their legs neatly placed to the side to give their bodies tidy 's' shapes. A reticent boy sits to their right slightly apart from the group with his legs neatly crossed. Another boy in the centre of the photograph stands upright with arms folded, feet together while to my right virtually tucked in behind my shoulder sits another girl with her hands clasped in her lap and her legs neatly crossed at the ankles. It appears that in the context of the school, despite an individual teacher's more liberal attitude, children work to produce orderly bodies so used are they to commands to sit still, fold your arms, cross your legs that body work such as this becomes an important means of gaining the approval of the authorities/teachers. Only one of the thirteen children appears to resist this bodily containment. He lays on a branch above all our heads his body fully stretched out in a fork of the tree. His arms are extended above his head, his shirt caught in the breeze and one leg sturdily braced against the branch.

Perhaps it is not surprising that resistance to the regulation of bodies does not come easily given the late 20th century and early 21st century's preoccupation with the body in the form of plastic surgery, dieting and exercise regimes and the other trappings that go with the body beautiful in celebrity, consumer culture together with the burgeoning of sports science in the pursuit of top performances in the world of professional athletes. The schooling of bodies such as those in my school photograph and conceptions of the body's role in learning is receiving increasing attention of late in body orientated sociological literature with articles such as those of Allison James (2000).

James (2000) uses 'body' in the sense of "the subjective (mindful) experience of being a body(embodiment)" (p. 36) and outlines the two views of the body commonly occurring in sociological literature in general and not just in the relatively recent sociological study of childhood. It was actually in 1992 that Emily Martin observed that what was occurring was "the end of one kind of body and the beginning of another kind of body" (p. 121). On the one hand the body has been viewed as a natural entity, a fact of nature, subject to laws of biology and occurring prior to the influences of culture. The focus falls on sexual differences between males and females and such differences are used to account for role differentiation in social life with males seen as leaders and females as nurturers. Chris Shilling (2003) describes such an approach as reductionist since:

the structure of society is explained not only on the basis of individuals within it, but the intentions, actions and potential of individuals are explained as a result of some aspect of their physical or genetic constitution (p. 60).

He describes how a corporeal view of reality becomes reified when people's essential differences such as male/female and black/white become markers of a seemingly naturally occurring social distinction.

In contrast to this conception of the body as a purely biological phenomenon, there is a notion of the body as socially constructed. James (2000) describes this as a rejection of materialism and a focus on the ways in which the body is constrained, shaped and indeed invented by society. She explains how the writings of Michel Foucault have been enormously influential in informing this view of the body. Poststructural in orientation, this view of the body looks to Foucault to account for the ways in which the body is a product of and under the control of discourses that circulate in the institutions of society such as its schools. It is here that her definition of the 'mindful' body comes into play or as explained by Chris Shilling:

the mindful body is not just a fleshy object, but is defined through its possession of consciousness, intentions and language. It is controlled less by brute force, as in traditional societies, and more by surveillance and stimulation (2003, p. 67).

Critics of this approach to the body, including James and Shilling, highlight how such an analysis is in fact disembodied in that the materiality of the body is lost; the biology of the body vanishes as the mind takes over as the *locus in quo* where the power of discourse resides. Shilling (2003) goes so far as to describe the mind as disembodied in Foucault's analysis since its abstraction fails to convey any real sense of a mind located within an active body. The natural essentialism of the naturalistic view of the body has been replaced according to Shilling by 'discursive essentialism' (p. 71). James' concerns focus on the denial of any autonomous agency to bodies or a notion of the body as a central constituent in human agency, despite Foucault's insistence that where there is the power of discourse there is also resistance, and, in keeping with those of Thomas J. Csordas (1994), she is concerned with fact that both these approaches take embodiment for granted and do not problematize the experiencing body. Margot L. Lyon and Jack M. Barbalet (1994) see embodiment as the basis of our capacity for social agency, "to collectively and individually contribute to the making of the social world" by people concurrently experiencing themselves "*in and as their bodies*" (p. 54). Csordas calls for a reframing of the issues by posing the question: "why not then begin with the premise that the fact of our embodiment can be a valuable starting point for rethinking the nature of culture and our existential situation as cultural beings?" (p. 6).

In his introduction to *The Body, Childhood and Society*, Alan Prout (2005) responds to this by building on Shilling's 2003 observation that in recent sociological studies "something of a realignment between naturalistic and social constructionist approaches" (2003, p. 88) had begun to emerge although there was no fully

developed perspective as such. These analyses were, however, taking seriously a view of “the body as simultaneously biological and social” (p. 109). Prout’s model involves regarding childhood bodies as hybrids of both culture and nature, accepting both as complementary and regarding social life as involving an interaction of both the material and the discursive. In seeking to avoid the shortcomings of the dualisms of the two previous views of the body, biology and culture, Prout looks to Shilling’s view that the human body is socially and biologically unfinished at birth and that changes occurs over the life course, and have to be worked at, both biologically and socially. Significantly, this positions children as social actors possessing agency as they interpret, negotiate and utilize their bodies in relation to other bodies to fashion and refashion their identities and construct meanings from their experiences.

Children are treated as speaking, knowing and experiencing subjects, as social actors actively involved in the social worlds they live in, and as interactive agents who engage with people, ideologies and institutions and through this engagement forge a place for themselves in their social worlds (Leena Alanen, 1997 cited in Prout, 2000).

Gone is the view of childhood as a process of socialization whereby children are just passive, “acted upon, regulated, disciplined and determined” (Prout, 2000, p. 7), to be replaced by a more dynamic model where children take part in the shaping of, as well as being shaped by, society. In the school setting the body can become a site of contestation as children, for example, use their bodies to resist attempts to produce Foucault’s ‘docile bodies’. Brenda Simpson (2000) documents how adolescent boys use bodily functions such as farting, belching, burping and body odour to resist and, not too subtly, subvert classroom order and discipline. Studies such as these foreground the ‘fleshy body’ in the school setting, describing as they do how children can use their bodies to position themselves within educational hierarchies,

and, despite its shadowy presence in educational discourse, to characterize the body as a veritable lacuna is to overstate the case.

The dualisms of mind and matter, body and mind were rejected by the progressive American educational theorist, John Dewey, with the publication of his books on education such as *Democracy and Education* (1916), *Art as Experience* (1934) and *Experience and Education* (1938). He emphasized the importance of active involvement of the learner and learning by doing. Friedrich Fröbel, founder of the kindergarten movement in Germany in the mid-nineteenth century, stressed the importance of bodily activity in learning as children learned through movement and games and through their own spontaneous play. Learning was to be looked upon as a dynamic process involving making the 'inner outer' and the 'outer inner'. Maria Montessori, a contemporary of Dewey's but working in Italy, stressed the importance of self-directed learning activity. There are echoes today of this recognition of the importance of children's bodily and perceptual experience in learning in the project based learning advocated by Howard Gardner and inquiry-based learning in *The New Zealand Curriculum* (2007). However, despite these references, what remains under theorized in their ideas is the relationship between embodied activity and cognition.

It is in Swiss psychologist, Jean Piaget's theory of the origin of intellect (Phillips, 1969) that we find specific theorization of the role of the body in learning. He carefully documented the intelligent behaviour of his own children as small infants as they acted physically on their world. He posited a theory of six stages and labelled the first two years of life as the sensorimotor stage (Elkind, 2009; Phillips, 1969). He characterized this period as a time of embodied exploration of the environment by infants as they develop their understanding of their own bodies and how their bodies relate to people and things in the world. In this way they exhibit intelligent behaviour not by thinking but by acting physically on the world. These

sensorimotor actions form the basis of later conceptual schema as the logic of coordinated activity is translated to internal thought processes. The assumption in Piaget's theory is that higher levels of thought, 'formal operations' or abstract thought, characteristic of later stages of development are unrelated to sensorimotor behaviour, but that the embodied activities of infancy are an essential element in the construction of an understanding of their world. Piaget's work has been criticized as underestimating children's physical reasoning skills (Anne B. Smith, 1998) but this does not negate the role of embodied experience in early conceptual development.

Interesting links between the discursive and the material in learning, gender and the body have been made by scholars such as Judith Butler and Ian Burkitt. In a 1998 interview with Irene Costera Meijer and Baukje Prins to discuss her works *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter* (1993), Judith Butler, in reply to a question about "object" bodies, responded by denying that there was, on the one hand, a discursive construction of the body and, on the other hand, a lived body.

I think that discourses do actually live in bodies. They lodge in bodies; bodies in fact carry discourses as part of their lifeblood. And nobody can survive without, in some sense, being carried by discourse (Meijer & Prins, 1998 p. 282).

Debates about the material versus the discursive have been described as 'sterile' and such dichotomies have been argued to be unhelpful (Gill *et al.* 2005): "the material and the discursive are inextricably linked, and nowhere more clearly than in the body, as the notion of embodied identity is designed to show" (p. 44). Accordingly, throughout this thesis when references are made to 'discourse' and 'the discursive' it is with the understanding, as articulated by Butler, that discourses are part of the lifeblood of bodies.

In his consideration of the “ways in which the body is made active by social relations” (1998, p. 63), Ian Burkitt outlines a perspective where the characteristics of humans are seen as ‘socio-natural’ rather than either social or natural. In concluding that there is no complete separation “between nature and culture, body and mind, materiality and knowledge”, he argues for an understanding of these dimensions as “interconnected through mediated relations and practices, involving the thinking bodies of persons and selves” (p. 80). Like Shilling (2003) he adopts a view of the body as incomplete at birth, both biologically and socially, and engaged in an ongoing process of becoming. Drawing on the work of Young, Grosz and Pierre Bourdieu, he outlines how the social and the biological processes blend to produce for each of us a biography that is:

the life history of the person, the way that their location in relationships and culture has formed the various selves. The person’s place in relationships — which includes their status, living standards, working practices, beliefs etc. — becomes invested in every sinew of their body, reflected in the way they walk and talk, the way they present themselves to others, their gestures and manners, dispositions and tastes. A person’s class, gender and racial position in the group will be reflected in bodily carriage, gestures, capacities accent and tone of voice, and also in the way that they experience their bodies (Burkitt, p. 79).

The significance of this for my research project is that in the learning context, as young boys negotiate masculinities in schools, as they position themselves and are positioned within the many webs of meaning that constitute gender within educational institutions, their bodily comportment and movement, how they occupy space, how they relate to other bodies, their lived experiences, will be a manifestation of these constructions of gender. Further, what might the consequences be where this sense of becoming, both socially and biologically, places emphasis on physicality, on vigorous activity, on the joy of movement, on the excitement of rough and tumble play, and on what psychoanalyst, Ken Corbett, in *Boyhoods: Rethinking*

Masculinities (2009) calls “muscular eroticism” —the traditional view of boys and masculinity as “aggression, muscularity, exhibitionism, dominance and phallic preoccupation” (p. 212) — runs counter to a school’s regime of constraint and the schooling of Foucault’s ‘docile bodies’? How might boys’ learning dispositions be affected by such a challenge to the traditional role of schools in the disciplining and controlling of children’s bodies? And how might these consequences be both observed and documented?

Queering the Primary School Classroom

Education is not something that involves comfortably repeating what we already learned or affirming what we already know. Rather, education involves learning something that disrupts our commonsense view of the world (Kumashiro, 2002, p. 63).

It was with considerable interest that I read Emma Renold’s statement that in her doctoral research, *Presumed innocence: an ethnographic investigation into the construction of children’s gender and sexual identities*, she “did not set out to study children’s sexual cultures” (2003, p. 180). In a paper that resulted from her doctoral work, she outlines how her original focus, like mine, was on exploring gender relations but that she found herself “increasingly witnessing a complex, interactive and daily network of heterosexual performances by both boys and girls as they negotiated their gendered selves” (p. 180). Increasingly aware of the inter-relatedness of gender and sexuality, she then changed her focus to investigating how children’s lived experiences as boys and girls and, in particular, their identity work was underpinned by dominant notions of heterosexuality. My awareness of the close connection between gender and sexuality did not fully emerge until the data analysis stage of the project possibly because, unlike Renold who was working with children in their final year of primary school, I was focussing on children in their first two years of primary schooling. It is true to say that at the start of this project I would have constructed 5, 6 and 7 year-old

children as predominantly sexually innocent and ignorant and probably regarded sexual knowledge as inappropriate for them. Kerry H. Robinson (2013) describes this position as part of a dominant discourse of 'childhood innocence' which not only regards young children as sexually naive but also sees the coupling of childhood and sex/uality as 'thinking the unthinkable'. She argues instead that sex/uality is an important component of children's subjectivities, as important as gender or ethnicity, and that they "engage in the construction of their sexuality and sexual desire early in life" (p. 16). Previously, when I had observed young children playing 'mothers and fathers' or heard them talking of their girlfriends and boyfriends I would have smiled and thought of their play as charmingly innocent perhaps reflecting the perspective that Deborah Youdell (2005) highlights as "the people who populate schools —students and teachers —are constructed as non-sexual" (p. 251). Or, as explained by Debbie Epstein and Richard Johnson (1998), it was a case of my unconsciously desexualizing the children's play while at the same time affirming heterosexual behaviour and desire, *eros*, by reading them traditional, romantic stories of handsome princes falling in love with and marrying beautiful princesses. However, I now see that through queering such everyday scenarios, a deeper understanding of the social construction of gender becomes possible and, in particular, just how constraining this process can be for children.

The word *queer*, historically a derogatory term and a term of abuse frequently hurled by the homophobic at those they positioned as deviant, has been reclaimed by members of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered groups. Robyn Ryle (2012) describes this reappropriation "as an act of empowerment to take a word that has been used as an insult against a group to which you belong and claim it for yourself and the group" (p. 85). It is therefore being used in a political sense by an individual who proclaims 'I'm queer' or 'I am a queer'. Here the word is obviously being used as an adjective or a noun but in queer theory it is also put to work as a verb although not in the usual sense of 'to spoil' as in 'to queer the pitch'. In a less obvious meaning

that derives from the Latin, and its Proto-Indo-European base ‘twerk’, queer is used by theorists, such as Judith Butler and Eve Sedgwick, to mean ‘to twist, turn or wind’. Deborah Britzman explains that “the queer and the theory in Queer Theory signify actions, not actors. It can be thought of as a verb, or a citational relation that signifies more than the signifier” (1995, p. 153). James Sears, an independent scholar and editor of *Journal of LGBT Youth*⁵ describes queering education as a complex, reflexive, and transformative process of refusing schooling as a “great sexual sorting machine” that privileges heterosexuality and makes assumptions about sexual destinies, to one where queering happens “when we look at schooling upside down and view childhood from the inside out” (1999, p. 5). He talks about exploring our taken-for-granted assumptions about children, childhood and identity so as to “afford *every* child dignity rooted in self-worth and esteem for others” (p. 5). For my project I interpret this to mean looking again, perhaps looking askew, at children’s everyday interactions at school to see beyond the obvious developmental explanations for their interactions to reveal the processes of normalization that privilege heterosexuality as they go about constructing, negotiating and maintaining their gendered selves. From this perspective biological determinism is refused with gender instead being viewed as performative and constituted through what Judith Butler labels the heterosexual matrix (2006, p. 208).

Mindy Blaise and Affrica Taylor (2012) add a third concept to *gender performativity* and *the heterosexual matrix*, as key concepts used by queer theorists and utilized by early childhood educators and researchers seeking to shed new light on children’s gendered behaviours — that of *heteronormativity*. All three are said to “offer teachers a sharpened appreciation of the powerful ways in which gender and heterosexuality

⁵ The *Journal of LGBT Youth* is the interdisciplinary forum dedicated to improving the quality of life for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth.

discourses work together to produce and reinforce gender stereotypes” (Blaise & Taylor, 2012, p. 92). As a portmanteau word, heteronormativity blends the meanings of the two words heterosexual and normative to refer to the assumption that everybody is, by nature, or should be, heterosexual. Judith Butler originally sketched out her concept of gender performativity in 1990 *Gender Trouble* and developed it further in 1993 in *Bodies that Matter*. She explained it as having two dimensions. Firstly, instead of gender resulting from our inner essence, it is ‘performative’; to be masculine is to perform masculinity and to be feminine is to perform femininity. She was careful to emphasize that performativity was not something that a subject did; she instead characterized it as a process through which the subject was constituted. Secondly, “performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual” (2006, p. xv). Later, consistent with her engagement with Foucauldian ideas, she clarified the citational dimension of performativity — that utterances bring into being that which they name and that they do it in that very moment as they cite previous practices, current conventions and reiterate established norms. For instance, when the midwife announces, ‘It’s a girl’ s/he begins the process. This declaration cites the authority of relevant norms or established conventions about what a girl is. Butler describes this initiation as the process of ‘girling the girl’. She explains that “a certain ‘girling’ is compelled, the term or, rather, its symbolic power, governs the formation of a corporeally enacted femininity that never fully approximates the norm” (1993, p. 177). The declaration is therefore both a productive *and* a regulatory moment. It is an iterative process in that the relevant norms must continue to be cited if the individual is to succeed in remaining a viable subject. This repetition gives the impression that such practices are ‘normal’. Interestingly, Deborah Youdell (2006) interprets Butler’s notion of the performative for education to mean that since it is the very act of designation that constitutes the subject rather than describing a pre-existing subject, “nobody is necessarily anything and so what it means to be a teacher, a student, a learner might be opened up to radical rethinking” (p. 43). What it means in this respect is that queering education,

as well as opening up opportunities for exploring taken-for granted assumptions about identities and difference, also offers the possibility of its being transformative for as Butler herself notes “what is at stake are the activities through which gender is instituted and, then, stands a chance of being *de*-instituted or instituted differently (2006, p. 529).

Queer theorists like Butler maintain that this performativity, or becoming, can only be made sense of through what she calls the heterosexual matrix, “that grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are naturalized” (Butler, 1990/2006, p. 208). Mindy Blaise and Affrica Taylor (2012) describe the matrix as a metaphor used by Butler to explain how gender performativity occurs within the structure of a pair of dualisms, masculinity/femininity and heterosexuality/homosexuality, in such a way that the only viable option is masculinity, femininity *and* heterosexuality. Butler (1990/2006) goes on to give more details of her grid as:

... a hegemonic discursive/epistemic model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositional and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality (p. 208).

In the light of this Youdell (2005) maintains that in order to understand the gendering practices of schooling, analysis should proceed from the understanding that these practices are “permeated by enduring hetero-normative discourses that inscribe a linear relationship between sex, gender and (hetero-)sexuality within the ‘heterosexual matrix’” (p. 253). For the purposes of this project I interpret Butler’s notion of ‘intelligible genders’ to mean that being a ‘real’ boy or girl involves, among other things, “desiring or growing up to desire the opposite sex” (Renold, 2005, p. 7); a masculine male who grows up to partner a feminine female. Conversely,

‘unintelligible genders’ would involve deviations from the normative discourses of masculinities and femininities, including this heterosexual imperative, that are constituted and made available in any given cultural context “—that is, those in which gender does not follow from sex and those in which the practices of desire do not “follow” from either sex or gender” (Jagose, 1996, p. 84).

Elizabeth Atkinson and Renée DePalma (2009) note the widespread use of Butler’s metaphor of the heterosexual matrix by researchers working in educational settings and particularly by those who employ feminist and queer analyses in their work. With specific reference to their own research, they caution that taking the matrix for granted can work to preserve it and in effect “reify, reinforce and reinscribe it, even as we attempt to subvert, unsettle or deconstruct it” (p. 17). In this way the matrix becomes a dominant or hegemonic discourse and one not easily contested. However they remind us that Gramscian hegemony requires both consent and constant re/construction and, interestingly, they make use of another metaphor themselves by likening the latter process to knitting⁶; “someone is always knitting the matrix” (p. 19). This draws our attention to the idea that the matrix is not something ‘out there’ but instead should be seen as “a produced and productive force” that, through discourse, “we are constantly engaged in creating and re-creating” (p. 19). In this way we are urged to see the matrix not as something oppressive, out there, to be destroyed but, through a process of reflexivity, to see it as a collective process and to work at becoming more aware of the occasions when we, as teachers and researchers participate, nay, collude in its perpetuation, albeit unconsciously. “If we stop knitting, we stop consenting – and ...knitting otherwise can have powerful implications (p. 27)⁷. But before we can begin to seek out opportunities to silence the

⁶ A metaphor which I too make use of in the following methodology chapter because of its rich imagery such as ‘dropping a stitch’, ‘unraveling’ or ‘tending to one’s knitting’.

⁷ Atkinson and DePalma’s citational chain links to Valerie Walkerdine: “How we carry out the research, what questions we ask, what counts as data, what is judged to be true are all entangled in the pursuit of ‘the truth’, and we get caught up in this too. Our research becomes a process of disentangling, of pulling ourselves free of the web. It is like unpicking knitting, the

clacking of the knitting needles we need first to hone our skills of hearing them at work.

All this reminds me of Bronwyn Davies' 2000 description of using poststructuralist theories in her work with teachers and primary school children. She concedes that for many of us this reflexive awareness does not always come easily:

Reflexive awareness of one's own pattern of speaking and interacting in the very moment of interacting and speaking seemed to me not so difficult. But the capacity to become reflexively and critically literate, to catch oneself in the act of constituting the world in particular ways, seems, to most teachers I have talked to and worked with, outside the range of possibility (p. 13).

Difficult or not, the importance of interrogating the ways in which, in our research, we employ the matrix to make meaning of children's lived experiences lies in an understanding that there is no matrix of rules out there to be destroyed, that we are the matrix and most importantly not to lose sight of Butler's depiction of a matrix of rules as being porous and malleable, incomplete and transformable.

There are, after all, other things to do with rules than simply conforming to them. They can be displayed. They can be recrafted. Conformity itself may permit for a hyperbolic instantiation of the norm that exposes its fantastic character. In this sense, then, a certain errancy within expertise, a certain poeisis that shows what else a set of rules might yield offer us options that exceed the binary framework of coercion, on the one side, and escape, on the other (2006, p. 533).

While queering the primary classroom can make it possible for me as a researcher to understand better what I see and hear and, in particular, to become more aware of the regulatory forces at work in these research settings, being critically queer

wool still bearing the imprint of the knots which formed it into a garment. This garment often seemed to fit us well and even to keep us warm on winter nights. Taking it apart can be painful and does not reveal the easy certainty of answers" (1998/2012, p. 15).

involves the realization and re/presentation that such forces are not so pervasive that they cannot be bent, twisted or circumvented. In the same way I need to consider carefully how these hegemonic forces can be at work in my observations, interpretations and analysis. Queering enables me to ponder how I can knit otherwise so as to engage in a truly reflexive research process that “is potentially a transgressive intervention that may disturb, contest, and challenge some of the basic assumptions that underpin the concept of masculinity” (Mac an Ghaill & Haywood, 2011, p. 69).

Chapter 3

**“Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?”
“That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,” said the Cat.⁸**

Introduction

Douglas Ezzy (2002) employs the image of “a multidimensional tangled ball of wool” to represent the set of data that he collects during a research project. He describes his interviews, observations and reflections as having numerous threads woven through them and how he sees the task of writing as drawing out from this multifaceted ball a single thread that becomes “a linear story with a beginning, middle and end” (p.139) but, nevertheless, a story that retains the complexity and nuances of the original ball of information. I want to extend Ezzy’s imagery by likening the writer to an accomplished knitter who skilfully transforms single strands of thread into complex, richly textured, intricately-patterned fabrics that are simultaneously works of art and practical utilitarian garments. As a proficient knitter, I am very aware that to drop a stitch means that a piece of work would start to run like a ladder in a stocking. To snag a completed jersey also risks having the work unravel at an alarming rate. Knitted fabrics are also stretchy in all directions. There are obvious parallels with the work of a qualitative researcher working within the perspective of poststructuralist feminism.

There is an art to weaving together stories of both the researcher and the research participants in the form of autobiographical and biographical narratives as well as personal experiences of and reflections on the research process. Diverse voices may be juxtaposed to create an intricately interwoven multivocal text where the authorial voice is but one among many although, given the different power dynamics, it is the authorial voice that has the final word. Theory and the findings of fellow researchers are linked with the results that emerge from the current project. There is a very real

⁸ Carroll, Lewis. *Alice in Wonderland*

sense in which all these elements are held together actively like the stitches on a knitting needle requiring constant attention for fear that to drop one would see the 'fabric' of the report start to unravel. Knitted fabric is stretchy in all directions which is one of its strengths. Moulding this elasticity into a suitably functional garment calls upon the knitter's expertise and in the same way a researcher is required to fashion supple data to illustrate significant themes or issues that address the research questions.

My challenge was to fashion a research design that would generate "good data—thick, rich, description and in-depth, intimate interviews" (Harrison, MacGibbon & Morton, 2001, p. 323) in order to amass that multidimensional, multifaceted, tangled but not too tangled, ball of wool. Having been a primary school teacher and a teacher educator for a total of thirty-six years, I was only too aware of the fact that classrooms are remarkably complex places where the interactions between teachers, pupils and the curriculum can be mediated by the dynamics of gender, class, ethnicity, race, dis/ability and sexuality but that for many of us these complexities remain hidden in the cultural rituals of teaching (Nuthall, 2005; Stigler & Hiebert, 1998, 1999; Gallimore, 1996). In their work Graham Nuthall, James W. Steigler, James Hiebert and Ronald Gallimore argue that classroom teaching is a cultural ritual that we all assimilate primarily through our experiences as pupils. As such, these habitual ways of thinking, feeling and acting, while guiding our conduct, both as teachers and as learners, become so much a part of who we are, that we are unaware of how they shape our perceptions. Bronwyn Davies (2003) has described this as a process of looking through a window and not seeing the glass. What seemed like an extraordinarily difficult task then was to devise a research design that would make visible for me, aspects of these invisible processes that I was so steeped in, so that I could explore how different ways of understanding masculinities are played out and negotiated in New Zealand Primary schools and what impacts these might have on

boys' learning dispositions. As I set about this work I could not help but recall the words of the poet:

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time. (T. S. Eliot, *Little Gidding*, Four Quartets)

I employed a variety of data producing strategies with the desire of fulfilling Clifford Geertz's 1973 definition of the intellectual effort involved in ethnography as "an elaborate venture in, to borrow a notion from Gilbert Ryle, 'thick description'" (p. 6). The intention was to gain as detailed a picture as possible "of the phenomenon under investigation" (Smith, 2008, p. 1) so that subsequent accounts of the research would indeed be rich, thick descriptions. The methodology was qualitative involving classroom-based case studies in two Christchurch primary schools. I observed and generated data in one class in each school. I used focus group interviews with the children and from these I identified seven boys, four in the first school and three in the second, for closer observation. These observations involved audio and video-recordings, as well as my own direct observations, of their participation in their classroom literacy programmes for a period of one week. I also observed, during this same week, the boys in their interactions with other children during their playground activities at playtimes and lunchtimes. These observations of the children at play were supplemented by conversations with the children about their own drawings of their playground activities.

In seeking to design a research project to explore and understand, from their points of view, aspects of the complex lived schooling experiences of the seven boys, I was mindful of two notions. Firstly, that qualitative research is not homogeneous in that "there are a number of different approaches, each with overlapping but different

theoretical and/or methodological emphases” (Smith, 2008, p. 2) and secondly, that the meanings of terms such as *constructivism* and *interpretivism* “are shaped by the intent of their users” (Schwandt, 1994, p. 118). Accordingly, this chapter gives details not only of the research design, by elaborating on each of these data collection procedures, but also on the methodological understandings, the theory of knowledge and the interpretive framework (Harding, 1987; Lather, 1992), that have informed, guided and helped to shape the project.

A Qualitative Approach

Norman K. Denzin and Katherine E. Ryan define qualitative research as:

multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret these things in terms of the meanings people bring to them (2007, p. 580).

Writing from a North American point of view, they identify a number of historical moments stretching from 1900 to the present and beyond. The seventh and final moment is defined as the *future* (2000—), which is of course now, a time they characterize as qualitative research being put to use in the interests of social justice issues. They emphasize how the social sciences are currently being asked to become sites for critical engagement with issues such as race, gender and class. Importantly for them the qualitative research process is defined by three interrelated basic activities. These involve the researcher, who is gendered and situated by factors such as class, race, sexuality and ethnicity, viewing the world with a particular theoretical perspective or ontological framework that gives rise to a set of questions that are investigated in certain ways. In effect, this means that data or materials relevant to the research questions are generated, pondered over and put into writing. At all stages of the research process the researcher carefully considers and attends to

ethical issues and the politics of research as well as political concerns arising from allegiances to particular communities of concern, for example, those working within poststructuralist feminist frameworks.

In contrasting qualitative and quantitative research, Denzin & Ryan (2007) draw attention to the lack of measurement or quantification, “in terms of quantity, amount, intensity or frequency” (p. 582), in qualitative research instead observing that qualitative work entails a focus on processes and, favouring an emic approach, a concentration on meanings especially the meanings that participants assign to their own experiences. For Rose Barbour (2007), who acknowledges Laurel Richardson’s crystallization imagery of prisms that reflect and refract light to create “different colors (sic), patterns, arrays...” (Richardson, 1997, p. 92), a qualitative approach involves looking at an issue or an idea from a variety of angles; its strength lying in capturing multiple voices of different social actors in any particular setting. Consistent with poststructuralism, qualitative investigations strive to hear and re/present voices that have been silenced by telling the different stories that emerge from the same social setting given that there is no ‘truth’. “There’s no capital ‘T’ truth out there to be discovered, and researchers who are doing qualitative work, it seems to me, are trying to get as many representations, variations, stories of meaning as they can” (Barclay –McLaughlin & Hatch, 2005, p.223). Uwe Flick (2009), after Geertz, encapsulates this idea very well when he describes an important difference between qualitative research and more positivist approaches as lying in the former’s use of inductive strategies where instead of starting from a theory and testing it “knowledge and practices are studied as *local* knowledge and practice”. For him, the essence of this is “the study of subjective meanings and everyday experiences and practice” (p. 12).

A Poststructuralist Feminist Approach

Although my research design draws on a number of research perspectives the framework I consider most appropriate for thinking about gender and different schooling experiences of a small group of 5–7 year old boys is poststructuralist feminism. This contrasts with the developmentalist approach to children and early childhood education and research, which Mindy Blaise (2005) describes as based on modernist notions of universality and objectivity, and positions children as merely adults in the making. By contrast, the new sociology of childhood views children as independent, competent and self-regulating agents (Buckingham, 2005). For instance, arguing for more ‘participatory’ approaches to research with children, which allow participants to define and describe their own reality, Angela Veale (2005) positions children as social actors and active meaning-makers who strive to make sense of themselves and their social worlds. She maintains that, while it has been more usual to position children as passive participants in research processes, with this increased awareness of children as social actors has come “a critical examination of traditional research methods and a search for methods that can serve as tools or frames for children’s experiences to be articulated in the research process” (p. 253). She advocates using ‘creative methods’ so that research participants, especially children, are able to explain, scrutinize and give meaning to their own experiences rather than having that meaning imposed on them by researchers. She encourages the use of participatory research methodologies which are defined as facilitating “the process of knowledge production, as opposed to knowledge ‘gathering’” (p. 254).

Poststructuralist feminism, as a specific way of thinking about the gendered world, how it is organized and how we come to understand it, explains the gendered subject as being constructed through diverse discourses, that such subjectivities are not fixed or essential instead always being in the process of becoming and, importantly, there

is therefore the potential of resistance and agency. Michael A. Peters and Nicholas C. Burbules (2004) suggest that one of the main methodological contributions of poststructuralism, especially from a Foucauldian perspective, has been the questioning of language as simply mirroring reality. Accordingly, ways of thinking and talking are seen as inextricably linked to power and knowledge and examination of interview transcripts, perhaps using discourse analysis, “situates texts in their social, cultural, political and historic context” (Cheek, 2000, p. 43) to explore questions such as “how, where, and to what strategic ends human subjects use discourses to construct complex, multiple and hybrid subjectivities” (Luke, 1995, p. 39).

Case Study Research

In keeping with much of the literature on specific research methods, Jennifer Platt begins her 2007 contribution to *The Sage Handbook of Social Science Methodology* with the observation that case study is a term “that has been used in a variety of different ways, not all of them clear, and some of them mutually inconsistent” (p. 100). In her discussion of the wide assortment of practices and understandings related to the term she identifies two aspects that have particular relevance for my work. She makes reference to a feminist researcher’s use of a case study approach noting the researcher’s reason for choosing this method. The researcher set out to study the processes involved in re/producing and perpetuating gender differences and felt that the more traditional quantitative methods would not adequately sustain the exploration of such processes. Also, in her review of the practitioner literature, she cites the rationale advanced in 1991 by Joe R. Feagin, Anthony M. Orum and Gideon Sjoberg. Regarding case studies as first and foremost a qualitative method, they accentuate its potential to reveal the workings of power in social interactions and to depict such interactions “in a manner that comes closest to the action as it is understood by the actors themselves” (p. 103). Since I was seeking to study an aspect

of the cultures of the two classrooms and to focus, in particular, on the gendering processes involved, a case study approach seemed appropriate as the best means of exploring how gender was socially constructed and negotiated by two groups of young boys in primary school classrooms and what impacts this might have on how they responded to learning opportunities. Burke Johnson and Larry Christensen (2012) describe the study of multiple cases in one research project as a collective case study approach and identify a potential advantage as being able to look for similarities and differences between the cases. I wanted to study the classroom processes in some depth rather than seeking a representative sample that would mean I would be able to generalize from the results. It seemed therefore prudent to limit the number of cases to ensure that the project was both manageable and practicable. Since theorizations about gender increasingly stress the need to take into account the intersection of multiple axes such as class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, dis/ability and so on, in the constitution of multidimensional subjectivities (Shields, 2008), multiple case studies with varied settings across these axes would be desirable.

Ethical Approval

The University of Canterbury has very robust policies and procedures for ensuring that researchers, staff and students, carry out their work with due concern for ethical principles, with sensitivity towards cultural values, and in keeping with the principles and meaning of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the Treaty of Waitangi. Specific values and principles identified are justice, safety, truthfulness, confidentiality and respect. Approval was sought and received from both the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee and the then Christchurch College of Education Ethics Committee. Part of this process included submitting for approval copies of prepared information sheets and consent forms for the school principals and the Boards of Trustees, the classroom teachers, and the parents or care-givers (see Appendix). The consent form for parents also included a space for their child to give his or her assent

to taking part in the study. Further details of how I addressed ethical issues are included in the description of the recruitment process.

Recruitment

The two schools to be contacted were selected with the guidance of my supervisors. Several factors influenced the decision about which two schools to approach. Firstly, very aware of the focus and theoretical orientation of my research and working from the understanding that boys come to understand themselves as particular kinds of 'subjects' and fashion their multiple masculinities through a complex interweaving of gender with other social factors such as socio-economic status, race, and ethnicity it was essential to choose two schools illustrative of such differences. How the two schools differed is explained below when I give details the two research settings. Secondly, when considering possible schools, thought was also given to where there might be principals and teachers who were familiar with the nature of educational research, possibly with some knowledge of the video and audio recording methods pioneered by Graham Nuthall and Adrienne Alton-Lee (Nuthall, 2007, 2012) that I was intending to utilize, and who we thought would be sympathetic to and willing to host a research project of this nature. And thirdly, choosing to work in two different schools was consistent with and informed by the rationale advanced by Paul Connolly in his 2004 study of boys and schooling. He explained that he selected boys "located towards opposite ends of the social class spectrum" since one of his stated aims was "to demonstrate the dangers of working with sweeping generalisations and the need, instead, to understand boys within their particular social contexts" (p. 99).

Of the two Christchurch primary schools selected, one was an inner city multicultural school with a decile rating of 2, and the second was a culturally less diverse school located in the southeast of Christchurch with a decile rating of 7. In

Aotearoa/New Zealand each school is ranked into a decile and “a school’s decile rating indicates the extent to which it draws its students from low socio-economic communities” (Ministry of Education, 2012). “Decile 1 schools draw their students from areas of greatest socio-economic disadvantage, Decile 10 from areas of least socio-economic disadvantage” (Education Review Office, 2012)⁹. In an article outlining class advantage in New Zealand schools, Martin Thrupp (2007) argues that higher decile schools are predominantly middle class. He goes on to make links between class, race and socio-economic status by maintaining that “in New Zealand, as elsewhere, class intersects with ethnicity. Pākehā and Asian families are much more likely to be middle class than Māori or Pasifika families, although both of the latter groups do have a middle class of course” (p. 79).

The important issue of intersectionality was taken into account in selecting the two schools in which to carry out the research. This was based on the understanding that gender intersects or is intertwined with other factors such as race, sexuality, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity. It was therefore considered important to choose two settings where there was a degree of diversity in terms of race, class and ethnicity. However, as the project evolved what became apparent was that despite the different cultures of the two schools there were quite striking similarities between the discourses and practices that the children talked about, enacted and embodied. Even though I listened closely, observed carefully and pondered endlessly, I could not identify in my data the specifics of how aspects of race were contributing to the construction of the boys’ subjectivities. Could the young age of the children account for this? I well recall the mother of a seven year old boy who

⁹ “Decile 1 schools are the 10% of schools with the highest proportion of students from low socio-economic communities, whereas decile 10 schools are the 10% of schools with the lowest proportion of these students” (Ministry of Education, 2012). Factors taken into account when calculating decile ratings include household incomes, occupation of parents/caregivers, household crowding, parents’ educational qualifications and income support received by parents/caregivers.

was in my composite year 1-3 class, telling me how he had arrived home perplexed one day because other children had told him that his best friend, J Kahu, was Māori. She reported to me his bewilderment as he asked “Is J. Kahu a Māori Mum?” J. Was simply his best friend and difference in race had not occurred to him.

Perhaps it was my own subjectivities that prevented me from attending to and addressing the question of how, in my analysis, race was implicated in the social construction of gender. Possibly it was my positionality as an ‘outsider’, my white, middle class, middle-aged Pākehā male view of the world that meant I was not well placed to address the issue of how race intertwines with other factors in the social construction of gender. There is, however, a deliberate reticence on my part that does come into play when research involves issues of race. My positionality as a researcher is significantly influenced by my attendance, many years ago, at a seminar presented by Linda Tuhiwai Smith soon after *Decolonizing Methodologies* had been published. She described Māori as the most researched group in Aotearoa New Zealand but described much of the research as ‘hit and run’ where Pākehā academics brought their ways of knowing to the study of Māori, gathered their data and disappeared without any thought to reciprocity to then carve out a career for themselves by acting as spokespeople for Māori. Different ways of knowing are poignantly portrayed in Patricia Grace’s short story *Butterflies*. A Māori girl’s view of butterflies as a pest is contradicted by her teacher who describes them as creatures of beauty. The girl’s grandfather explains by pointing out that the teacher buys all her cabbages from the supermarket. Clearly it is Māori scholars who are more qualified to speak on issues of race hence my reticence.

Once the necessary ethical approvals had been obtained from the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee and the Christchurch College of Education’s Ethics Committee, request letters were sent to the two school principals and their respective Boards of Trustees. In the letters I explained what participating in the

research project would involve by describing the nature of the research, the data collection processes, what I saw as the value of the outcomes that I hoped would result and details of how issues such as anonymity and confidentiality would be addressed. The letters were followed up with a phone call to arrange a face-to-face meeting with the principals to discuss these matters in more detail and to pass on to them the approved information sheets and the appropriate consent forms. The importance of *aroha ki te tangata* and *he kanohi kitea*, meeting face to face and respectfully meeting people on their terms, is stressed by leading Māori and indigenous educationalist and researcher, Linda Tuhiwai Smith in her guidelines for researchers, especially those working with indigenous communities (1999, 2005). Importantly, she cautions against the tendency to see ethics as compliance with institutional rules and processes rather than “about establishing, maintaining, and nurturing reciprocal and respectful relationships” (2005, p. 97). I saw these initial face to face meetings as an important step in the process of building such relationships.

The face-to-face meetings provided an opportunity to discuss in more detail what would be required of the classroom teachers of 5-6-year-olds, the kinds of teachers whose co-operation to help with the project might be sought and to answer any questions. I explained that I wanted to work with young children since much of the current debates about boys and their schooling focused on the scholastic achievements of adolescent boys and added that it was 5-6 year-olds that I had taught during my years as a primary school teacher. I was careful to emphasize that while the classroom teacher was not to be the primary focus of the research, that I would be neither watching nor evaluating her/his competence, the teacher's performance would inevitably be captured on videotape and that the impact of large amounts of recording equipment and an observer in the room might prove daunting for some. If the principal was sure that a teacher confident enough to cope with the demands of my research project could be found then I asked that a copy of a letter

outlining the details of the research be handed on. All letters contained provision for written consent, which was obtained before any further steps were taken. Each principal undertook to inform and obtain approval from the school's governing body, the Board of Trustees.

In due course, a face-to-face meeting was held with the prospective classroom teachers about what participation would involve and the challenges of having video cameras, microphones and an observer in the classroom. Again, I stressed that the children's experiences and the meanings that they attached to them were to be the focus of the project and that teacher's programme or performance was not under scrutiny. Once the teacher's co-operation and written consent had been obtained then information letters and consent forms were sent out to all the parents. The project only proceeded once informed permission had been obtained from all parents, teachers, principals and Boards of trustees.

At all of these meetings I took care to give details of how I would address ethical issues such as confidentiality and anonymity throughout the research process. I explained that I would not identify either the school or any of the pupils by their real names but would instead be using pseudonyms which the children would be asked to supply for themselves. I gave assurances that any information supplied to me by the schools together with data collected, such as the video tapes of classroom programmes, interview recordings and transcripts, would be kept secure in a locked filing cabinet to which only I would have access. I promised that participation in the research was voluntary, that participants would retain the right to withdraw and that data gathering would cease if anyone showed signs of distress.

The Research Settings and Methods of Data Production

Anglerton School, a decile 7, state funded, co-educational, full primary school (Years 1 to 8) serving the educational needs of its 5 to 13 year old pupils, has a roll of approximately 450 pupils and is situated in a Christchurch suburb. It is nestled in an area of avenues lined with well-established trees amid 100 year old villas and bungalows together with pockets a more modern housing which all befits its description as one of Christchurch's quiet, leafy suburbs. In contrast, Shene School's decile 2 rating indicates that its pupils come from less comfortable backgrounds. A state funded, co-educational, contributing primary school (Years 1-6) for pupils aged 5 to 11 years, Shene School has a roll of over 100 pupils and is also located in Christchurch. There are marked contrasts in the areas surrounding the two schools. According to the 2006¹⁰ census results 70% of Anglerton residents own their own homes while only 30% of Shene residents own theirs. The average household income in Anglerton is \$59,900 while in Shene the figure is \$32,000. While fifty per cent of Anglerton households are couples with children only 25% of Shene households are couples with children. Thirty per cent of Shene households are one parent families compared to 14% in Anglerton. Whilst 14% of Shene residents have a university degree or better, in Anglerton the proportion is 25%.

Reflecting the nature and compositions of their immediate communities, the ethnic make-up of Anglerton and Shene schools are appreciably different. Fifty-six per cent of Shene pupils are Māori, 27% Pākehā/New Zealand European, 5% Pacific and 12% other cultures including African, Asian and Dutch where 76% of Anglerton pupils are Pākehā/New Zealand European, 11% Māori, 1% Pacific and 12% other cultures

¹⁰ "Every five years Statistics New Zealand takes an official count of the population. The 2011 Census was not held on 8 March 2011 as planned, due to the Christchurch earthquake on 22 February 2011. The Government Statistician decided that a census could not be successfully completed in 2011 given the national state of emergency and the probable impact on census results" (Tatauranga Aotearoa Statistics New Zealand).

including Asian, South African and European. In keeping with its ethnic composition, Shene School has a strong commitment to providing a bicultural learning environment throughout the school. This includes not only an immersion class, where te reo Māori is used for teaching most of the time, and a bilingual class, where subjects are taught in both te reo Māori and English, but also an undertaking by all teachers to support the learning of te reo Māori and tikanga Māori in all their programmes. Anglerton School employs a part-time specialist kaiako te reo Māori, maintains a kapa haka group and the teachers have set themselves the goal of integrating te reo Māori in to their class programmes more consistently.

Fieldwork was carried out in one class at each school. Ono, Room 6 at Anglerton was a Year 2 class of 28 children, 15 girls and 13 boys. Although most of the children were 6 year olds and had been at school for at least eighteen months, some were still 5 year olds with less than a year at school. Room 2 at Shene was a composite Year 1, 2 and 3 class of 20 children aged 5-7 years with 12 girls and 8 boys. As well as the regular classroom teacher, a teacher aide was observed in each class working on a part-time basis on individualised programmes with one particular child in each room.

Focus Groups

Focus groups have been described as “little more than quasi-formal or formal instances of many of the kinds of everyday speech acts that are part and parcel of unmarked social life—conversations, group discussions, and the like” (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005, p. 887). Sue Wilkinson (2008) describes the use of focus groups in qualitative research as being centred on “engaging a small number of people in an informal group discussion (or discussions), ‘focused’ on a particular topic or set of issues” (p. 187). Esther Madriz (2003), who addresses the use of focus groups from a feminist/postmodernist perspective, identifies focus groups as combining features of

two of the most widely used techniques for collecting qualitative data—individual interviews and participant observations. She argues that not only do researchers have the opportunity to listen to and learn from what focus group participants have to say in a collectivist setting, but they also “allow social scientists to observe the most important sociological process —collective human interaction” (p. 365).

Wilkinson (2008) identifies flexibility as a strength of focus group research in that it is not tied to any specific theoretical framework but able to be used both within an essentialist framework, where it is assumed that individuals have their own idiosyncratic, personally generated “ideas, opinions and understandings” (2008, p. 188) or within a social constructionist framework where reality is understood to be produced collaboratively in the course of everyday social interactions. With my work positioned within a poststructuralist feminist approach to research, my account of focus groups sets out here how I understand the use of focus groups within my chosen framework, including both the merits of and possible problems with this strategy, together with a detailed reflexive account of how I set up and conducted the focus group interviews, what I hoped to achieve through using this method of data generation and my approach to data analysis.

Focus groups have been depicted as multifunctional but in the main performing three basic functions—pedagogic, political and inquiry (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2011). Of these, the third was the function of most significance for my project because of the possibility of obtaining, à la Clifford Geertz, the “richer, thicker and more complex levels of understanding” (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2011, p. 546) that I was seeking. From the perspective of poststructuralist feminism, with the understanding that language is not neutral and that realities are co-constructions of meanings between people, I viewed the main aim of the inquiry function of focus groups as producing “rich, complex, nuanced and even contradictory accounts of how people

ascribe meaning to and interpret their lived experience" (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2011, p. 546).

Wilkinson (1998) emphasizes the importance of social context and, in particular, "the construction of meanings and knowledge through interaction" (p. 111). She argues that making use of research methods that remove participants from their social context, such as one-to-one interviewing, needs to be regarded as unsuitable for feminist researchers. However, focus group interviews may not be naturally occurring social situations and therefore need to be regarded realistically as attempts at recreating a more relaxed, communal atmosphere capable of yielding high quality interactive data. Because of this I was particularly interested in what Amanda Keddie (2004) described as the use of 'affinity groups' in her research which "sought to examine the social dynamics of collective masculinities in the early school years" (2004, p. 36). She outlined how her approach was a modification of Hugh Mackay's affinity group method which he characterizes as using a pre-existing group for a discussion in the participants 'natural habitat' with minimal, if any, participation by the researcher (Mackay, 2012). Keddie's account of engaging a small group of boys, who were already friends, in relatively unstructured discussions at their school seemed an appropriate starting point for working out how I could make effective use of focus group discussions in my research. This approach seemed to also foreground interaction, as participants interact with each other and build on each other's ideas and arguments, as a very important feature of focus groups. Darren Langdridge and Gareth Hagger-Johnson (2013), while admitting that it is something of a crude split, suggest that there are basically two components to focus group discussions. The first component being the content of what is said and the second being the processes involved such as 'turn taking'. Nevertheless they conclude that it is the interactivity of using group discussions that is the most significant feature as such data "better reflects shared meanings – that is, collective or socially constructed understandings –

rather than simply gathering data from individuals that necessarily reflects their individual viewpoints" (p. 72).

Patti Lather (2007, 1986) and Máiréad Dunne, John Pryor and Paul Yates (2005) emphasize talking with people, whether in focus group discussions or interviews, as social events and, as such, occasions with the potential to produce knowledge interactively but always mediated by asymmetrical relations of power not just between the researcher and the participants but amongst the participants themselves. For, example it has been suggested that when young people participate in focus groups with their friends, only the "pack leaders talk" and "there seems to be considerable pressure for others to support those who talk in the group" (Krueger & Casey, 2009, p. 156). Charles L. Briggs (2003) warns that leaving existing hierarchies in place runs the risk of not only reinforcing current social patterns within the group but of the focus group also becoming a forum that discursively sustains the wider hegemonic social and cultural norms. However, in their discussion of focus group dynamics, Eilis Hennessy and Caroline Heary (2005) claim that not only does the presence of other participants support individuals to be more open in their responses but "that children may be encouraged to give their opinions when they hear others do so" (p. 237-238). In a similar vein, Pranee Liamputtong (2011) suggests that a focus group discussion as well as allowing individuals to convey their points of view it also "encourages the group members to speak up" (p. 21). In another study comparing individual interviews with focus groups, Heary and Hennessy (2006) found that while more unique ideas emerged from individual interviews than from the focus groups "analysis of the transcripts suggests that focus groups produced greater elaboration of the topics discussed than did individual interviews (p. 66).

As well as the potential for the peer group support that I was keen to secure by making use of focus groups, it has been claimed (James, 1986) that group work may

also be very attractive to researchers working from 'power-sensitive' critical perspectives such as that of poststructuralist feminism. Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Patricia Leavy (2011) suggest that the imbalance of power between the researcher and the researched is somewhat diffused because of the greater number of participants involved in group work and thus the control they can bring to bear over the flow of the discussion as opposed to that in one-to-one interviews. This may be the case in some circumstances but seems less straightforward to me when the participants are young children and the researcher is an adult. William A. Corsaro and Luisa Molinari (2008) and Ruth Emond (2005) address this point by suggesting that researchers can empower children by adopting the role of "an atypical, less powerful adult" (Corsaro & Molinari, p. 240). In Corsaro's case he was carrying out research in Bologna, Italy, a foreign country for him, and had little proficiency with the Italian language so the pre-school children, who were his research participants, positioned him as "an incompetent adult" (p. 240). Emond's participants, who were living in a children's home, knew she was studying for a PhD and positioned her, as a student, as "someone who needed their help" (p. 129). My situation mirrored hers in that the children knew that I too was studying at the university and when I asked them why they positioned me as a novice with answers such as "you want to find out how to be a teacher". Emond (2005) also suggests that in order to learn about the children's views, as adult researchers we must "suspend our sense of 'superior' knowledge" (p. 136). She goes on to comment that what is often missing from discussions on the role of reflexivity in accounts of research with children is an analysis of the children's readings of the adult researcher. Of particular interest to me was her observation that for researchers who are working in the world of children who are constantly under adult surveillance, a challenging but not impossible task for the adult researcher, is to see that the children come to understand that the participation and observation is a different form of surveillance. I stressed with the children in the focus groups that there was not a set of 'right' answers to my questions, that I was there to learn about their ideas and that they

were helping me with my work. I hoped that the children would come to see my role as more peripheral when I was observing them in class and in the playground and talking with them in groups, that this was part of my learning from them and therefore that they would not see me as an adult who was there to keep an eye on them to ensure they were always doing the right thing.

Focus Groups in Practice and Reflections on the Process

I determined that, based on this reading of the focus group literature, facilitating small group discussions would enable me, firstly, to create an environment comfortable enough for the children to feel free to talk about their ideas of what being girls and being boys meant to them by positioning myself as the facilitator/learner, secondly, to explore how these ideas are constructed interactively and finally, to observe group dynamics at work as understandings of gender are actively constructed, maintained and policed. In terms of a poststructuralist approach focus groups seemed a useful way of exploring the complexities, contradictions and possibilities of peer group dynamics as the children position themselves and are positioned by others within the parameters of available discourse. Seven focus groups were completed¹¹. Four were facilitated at Anglerton and three at Shene. Each group was comprised of between four to eight children. Experienced focus group researchers and authors Richard A. Krueger and Mary Anne Casey (2009) describe groups of this size as “mini-focus groups” (p.7) and depict them, as well as being more comfortable for participants, as more appropriate when researchers are wanting to understand participants particular insights and experiences by exploring an issue in some depth. I suggest that when working with young children, who may possess less sophisticated social and interactive skills, it may be more fitting to use these smaller more manageable mini-focus groups. In each school one of the groups contained both boys and girls while the remainder

¹¹ Focus group interviews were mentioned in the information sheets that requested signed consent from the parents and assent from the children.

were boy-only groups. These configurations came about because the children themselves chose who would be in each group. I saw this as one way of tackling the power differential in that it gave them a measure of control rather than my making all the decisions. I anticipated that being with friends would feel more natural for the children and lessen any feeling of discomfort. I was happy to use these differing combinations of boys and girls thinking that the group dynamics might be different with the presence of both genders as opposed to just boys. For example, if focus groups are designed to encourage social interaction similar to everyday life then having boys and girls present made sense since these were co-educational school settings in which the children were constructing and negotiating their understandings of gender. Christine Daymon and Immy Holloway (2011) note that “in mixed-gender groups, both genders have a tendency to ‘perform’ for each other” (p. 246) which they suggest may be ‘unhelpful’. I had observed this previously when using focus groups with adolescent students (Ferguson, 2004). However, I expected that with my research focussing on boys and their constructions of masculinities any occurrences of such ‘performances’ between boys and girls would provide useful interactive data for subsequent analysis. On the other hand I had observed the boys playing and working in single gender groups within their co-educational environment so it seemed appropriate to also facilitate boy-only focus group discussions.

Table 1: Focus Group

Focus Group	Location	Number of Children	Gender	Duration	Date	Picture Book
1	Anglerton	4	All boys	20 minutes.	November 06	William’s Doll
2	Anglerton	4	All boys	15 minutes	November 06	William’s Doll
3	Anglerton	8	Boys and girls	25 minutes	November 06	Jump
4	Anglerton	6	Boys and girls	20 minutes	November 06	Jump

5	Shene	4	Boys and girls	18 minutes	June 07	William's Doll
6	Shene	6	All boys	20 minutes	June 07	William's Doll
7	Shene	4	Boys and girls	15 minutes	June 07	William's Doll

The discussions took place in rooms close to the children's classrooms. At Anglerton I used a small room right next-door that was used regularly to withdraw individuals or small groups of children from their classes for group or one-to-one teaching or testing and therefore resembled a somewhat familiar space. At Shene the discussions took place in a nearby office that was used by teacher aides for one-to-one work with children with special education needs one of whom was a member of the class with whom I was working. The children took turns, as nominated by their teacher, to participate in these sessions so once again this space was not unfamiliar to them. It is claimed that holding focus groups in familiar spaces "helps to decrease the power of the researcher" (Liamputtong, 2011, p. 22). The children were seated on chairs arranged in a semicircle. I chose to sit on a chair of the same size thinking that by being at the same level as the children I was lessening the 'distance' between us. For the same reason I encouraged the children to use my first name rather than the more formal 'Mr'. At Anglerton, not by choice, I had been introduced to the class as Mr Ferguson which the children continued to use throughout our discussions while at Shene, having been introduced by my first name, this informality continued.

In each focus group discussion a children's picture book was used as stimulus material and these were chosen firstly, to focus attention on gender and secondly, to promote interaction amongst the participants. I chose to use Charlotte Zolotow's *William's Doll* and Michelle Magorian's *Jump* because both of them depict boys engaging in non-traditional behaviour and, in their storylines, they explore popular

conceptions of what constitutes gender-appropriate behaviour. Zolotow's book begins with the lines:

William wanted a doll.
He wanted to hug it
and cradle it in his arms

William's father seeks to distract him by giving him a basketball and an electric train. His brother and the boy next door call him a sissy and a creep but William's desire for a doll is undiminished. In Magorian's story, Steven, the central character, spends every Saturday morning watching his sister at her ballet class - jumping and dancing - and he longs to join in. However, his mother says that real boys do not dance; they play tough games like basketball. Like William with his doll, Steven is undeterred and, in time, he becomes an integral part of a ballet show, albeit a show with a strong sporting, basketball theme¹². Since, in these moments, both of the protagonists manage to offer some resistance to the dominant discourses about gender appropriate behaviour and, mindful of Foucault's (1982) encouragement to use points of resistance as starting points for interrogating the workings of power/knowledge in any given social setting, discussion of the picture books appeared to offer a useful strategy for tapping into the children's understandings of gender in their school settings.

I did not compile a set of questions in advance of the focus group discussions. I did not want to pre-empt the discussions by imposing my ideas of what was significant about the storylines. I preferred to be guided by what the children wanted to talk about in response to the stimulus material. After reading a passage of each story I asked open-ended questions such as "I'm wondering what you think about that". Depending on responses from the children I then asked more specific questions to

¹² Although this appears to sanitise dance for boys by incorporating a sporting motif, perhaps it is also an effective disruption of the sport/dance dualism discursively constituted in some Aotearoa New Zealand schools (Ferguson, 2004; Gunew, 1990).

explore in more depth topics first raised by them. For example, one of the children described dancing as “a girls’ thing” so I questioned him about what made some things girls’ things and some things boys’ things. Although aware that terms such as ‘boys’ and ‘girls’ were not neutral terms, and discussion of them would unavoidably evoke stereotypes, I thought that the more open-ended questions the more scope it gave the children to express their ideas and reactions to the storylines. There was one exception to this approach. The children did not voluntarily comment on William’s father’s actions so I asked a specific question about his motivation for rejecting the idea of William being given a doll. The interviews were taped, transcribed and, after a preliminary analysis, a selection was made of boys who appeared to have differing ideas about gender in that they appeared to be drawing on and positioning themselves within different discourses about what it means to be a boy (see below for details of the boys selected). These boys became the focus children for the next phase of the study that was closely modelled on Nuthall’s in situ studies (2007, 2012).

As stated, my decision to use of focus groups was predicated first and foremost on the need to create a safe interview environment for the children. At all times while I was working with the children I wanted them to feel comfortable and secure. I was concerned that young children might find one-to-one interviews with an adult they did not know very well daunting or scary. I was concerned that no-one would feel comfortable enough to talk without the presence of friends and felt that it would be up to me, in facilitating the discussion, to do my best to ensure that everyone had an opportunity to participate and to share their ideas as freely as possible. Although being together in a small group for instruction is a common experience for children in Aotearoa New Zealand junior primary school classrooms, leaving the security of their room to be engaged in conversation with some of their classmates and a relatively unknown adult would be unusual and perhaps a little unnerving for some. I hoped that allowing the children to choose which group of their classmates they

would join would be reassuring so that they would feel free to share their ideas 'publicly', openly, with confidence and without embarrassment.

By reading a picture book to the children I sought not only to stimulate and focus the discussion but also to create a more naturalistic setting and by doing so to shift the focus a little from the children themselves to lessen any feelings that their ideas and opinions were under some form of scrutiny by me. I anticipated that my skills in relating to young children over many years would not desert me and that I could quickly establish a ready rapport and a non-threatening atmosphere thereby setting the scene for a lively discussion. My aspiration was that the use of an everyday experience of talking, thinking and reading our way through a story would afford me some insight into the children's cultural understandings as expressed in their own words. I anticipated seeing examples of the ways in which meaning is produced interactively through talk and, with the emergence of differing perspectives as well as points of consensus, to have an opportunity to investigate the processes whereby children give meaning to their experiences in situ as they interactively co-construct their gendered identities.

My decision to make use of focus group was also based on understandings derived from my study of Foucault's work and in particular his notions of discourse, the subject, power and knowledge. In his later works, Foucault identified 'technologies of the self' (1988) as practices whereby we fashion ourselves according to our desires; desires that Bronwyn Davies and Chas Banks (1992) describes as discursively constituted patterns, including those relating to gender, inherent in storylines that we learn to take up as our own. They also make an important distinction between research conducted from a constructionist perspective and poststructuralist approaches to research observing that the latter, rather than taking participants accounts of their social world as "*the* account of that world ... seeks to understand the processes through which the person is made subject" (p.3). I anticipated that

through using focus groups these processes would become apparent to me as I caught glimpses of the culturally available meanings, embedded in discourse, that the children appeared to be drawing on when they interpreted the storylines presented in the picture books and related them to their own experiences and subjectivities.

From a poststructuralist perspective all the participants in focus group discussions, including the facilitator(s) of the discussions, potentially have available to them, “as both products and producers of the discourses through which their subjectivity is constructed” (Dunne *et al.* 2005, p. 38), multiple subject positions. I was concerned that possible subject positions might be limited due to the fact that our conversations were to take place in a school setting. I wanted to try to move beyond the interview merely becoming a ‘technology of the self’ where participants were positioned and fashioned themselves in accordance with traditional dualisms such as teacher/learner, adult/child, expert knower/novice. Nevertheless, to some extent I would be relying on the pre-existence of this adult/child dualism, with its expectation that children defer to the authority of the adult teacher, in order to run orderly focus group discussions but at the same time I wanted to tilt the balance of power away from me so as to position the children collectively as ‘knowers’, as information-rich participants who would willingly share, discuss and debate their ideas with me. I did this by informing the children that I was in their room and talking with them in groups in order to learn from them. I prefaced each focus group with comments that I did not have a set of ‘answers’ to my questions and really wanted to hear and record their ideas and opinions. All the while I was trusting that the words of the narrator in Antoine de Saint Exupéry’s *The Little Prince* would not altogether ring true: “Grown-ups never understand anything by themselves, and it is tiresome for children to be always and forever explaining things to them” (1943/1971, p. 4).

The Case Study Boys

Four case study pupils were selected from the Anglerton Year 2 boys in Ono Room 6 and three boys were selected from the Shene class of Years 1, 2 and 3 pupils in Rua Room 2¹³. In doing so I was working from the understanding that boys are subjective gendered beings, that schools are locations where multiple masculinities are negotiated and that not all boys are the same (Mac an Ghaill, 1996; Connolly, 2004). The selection of the boys was made after the various focus group interviews had been transcribed and a preliminary analysis completed. In this initial reading of the transcripts I looked for indicators of the different gender discourses within which the boys appeared to be positioning themselves, and within which they were being positioned by other children. I looked for differences in how they interpreted the storylines presented in each of the two picture books. I considered instances where they related their own stories of similar experiences or where they expressed differing opinions about the appropriateness or otherwise of the characters' actions and ideas. Heedful of the values of *manaaki ki te tanga* and *kaua e mahaki*, as outlined by Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2005) and careful not to divulge information that had been shared with me in confidence in the focus groups, I consulted with each of the classroom teachers, seeking to draw on their extensive knowledge of the boys before making the final choices. At these times my approach was to ask for

¹³ I completed all the fieldwork at Anglerton before moving on to Shene and intended to select four boys from the Shene class but due to a malfunction in the video recording equipment, that was only discovered after the filming had been completed at Anglerton, only three boys were selected from Shene. For some unexplained reason one of the individual audio recordings failed intermittently at Anglerton meaning that at times the sound was lost for one of the four boys. While there was still enough audio recording from the fourth boy not to eliminate his data completely from the project, it did seem prudent to make use of only the three reliable cameras and microphones at Shene hence selecting only three case study pupils for this second period of recordings.

information about a particular boy simply with an opening such as ‘tell me a bit about so-and-so’ rather than offering information and seeking to have my impression confirmed.

The final selection at Anglerton, who were all Pākehā/New Zealand European, was:

‘Pokémon’ a 6 year old boy in Year 2 who was prepared to question stereotypical comments made by others such as ballet being “only a girls’ thing” and “pink’s not a boys’ colour”. For example, during the discussion when one of the boys repeatedly described himself as “freaked out” because the boy in the picture book “did ballet, it’s a girls’ thing”, Pokémon reiterated his comments made earlier on in response to the mother in the book declaring that “real boys don’t do dancing” by saying “some boys do”. By suggesting that the differences between boys and girls activities were not hard and fast, he seems to be drawing on a discourse that allows for a range of ways of ‘doing gender’ opening up possibilities rather than closing them down.

‘B12’, a 6 year old in Year 2, who seemed to have definite and somewhat stereotypical ideas about what was appropriate for boys and girls when he stated “only girls like dolls, boys aren’t supposed to have dolls, they’re supposed to have toys, boy stuff, like Lego and electric trains”. He appeared to be discursively positioning girls and boys as polar opposites, as mutually exclusive categories, such that toys that were appropriate for boys were only appropriate for boys and those for girls were exclusively for girls. As far as construction of identity and his understandings of masculinity and femininity, this would appear to be limiting in that the differences between the two categories masculinity and femininity are clear-cut, yet unified within each category, and the identity of one is found in the negative reflection of the other.

'Ash' a 6 year old boy in Year 2 who appeared to challenge dominant ideas about being a boy. For example, he supported the right of the main character to make his own decisions and not be manipulated by the ideas of others with comments about boys playing with dolls such as, "they think that's only for girls to do, but he's allowed to do it if he wants". Ash's teacher informed me that when they invited children to come to school dressed as their favourite book character, Ash dearly wanted to dress up as the blue fairy from Daisy Meadows' Rainbow Magic Fairy books. His mother, anxious to protect him from teasing, dissuaded him from his desired plan. It would seem that Ash, by offering some resistance to dominant discourses about masculinity and femininity, was opening up the possible ways of his being in the world.

'Spyro', a 5 year old in Year 2 was described by his teacher as academically gifted. He positioned himself within a dominant discourse about boys by conceding that dolls were for girls but suggested that there were ways for William to avoid being teased by his brother and still being able to play with dolls, "maybe he can have it (the doll) at his Grandma's house, but, but make that his brother is not with him". Spyro seemed aware that there were a number of subject positions available to William by suggesting that William could be one kind of subject with Grandma and another with his brother. Spyro was also one of the few boys who saw beyond the immediate gender issue of boys and dolls when he commented "That's actually quite a good story" and when I asked him why he explained that by William learning to care for a doll "he knows, he'll know how to be a father".

The final selection at Shene was:

'Batman', a 7 year old Year 3 Pākehā/New Zealand European with Dutch heritage, who, as well as subscribing to the dominant discourse that "dolls

aren't for boys" and his father "thinks it's weird" introduced the discourse of heteronormativity, the heterosexual matrix, into our discussion with the comment that dolls "are only for his girlfriend". He too seemed to have set ideas and a restrictive understanding of masculinity which were regulated through the understanding that 'real' boys, as opposed to 'weird' boys, are those who will grow up to desire members of the opposite sex who learn their role through nurturing play with dolls.

'Buzz', a 7 year old Year 3 Pākehā/New Zealand European from a family which values the school's commitment to te reo Māori and tikanga Māori, who confidently stated that "boys are allowed to have dolls", that "I've already got one" and added that he was given it "a long time ago when I was a baby" which suggests that perhaps it was not something he chose or had control over. By doing so, although he acknowledged ownership and was questioning the dominant discourse, he seemed to be distancing himself somewhat from this alternative discourse.

'Spiderman', a 6 year old Year 2 Māori pupil, who stated that he did not want a doll because "I don't want to be a freak... because I'm not a girl" and that the toy he would choose would be "definitely the electric train... because it could run over the doll". He appeared to delight in the prospect of destroying the doll and its association with femininity suggesting that there was some sort of power dynamic at work and he was positioning himself in what for him was the most gratifying and powerful way he knew of 'doing boy'. Clearly, for him, this involved distancing himself from girls' toys, escaping any association with femininity and performing gender through a forceful and potentially violent act.

Classroom Observations and Video Recording

In *The Hidden Lives of Learners* Nuthall (2007) describes a shift that occurred in his research studies into understanding teaching and learning in the late 1970s and 1980s when he was working with Adrienne Alton-Lee. Rather than focussing on how teachers shaped children's learning, they shifted the focus to tracking the classroom experiences of selected individual pupils in order to understand processes of knowledge acquisition better and specifically how the classroom activities that teachers designed for pupils affected their learning. This involved setting up recording equipment in regular school classrooms. With the assistance of technician Roger Corbett:

miniature video-cameras with wide-angle lenses were attached to the ceiling in diagonally opposite corners of the room, so providing a view of the entire room. A further set of miniature cameras with zoom lenses was set up to focus on the selected students and those sitting around them. Each of these cameras was attached to the ceiling as far away from the selected student as possible so that no one could tell which person was the focus of the camera (p. 57).

The teachers and the children also wore miniature broadcast microphones each of which was fitted with an on/off switch so that they could be switched off by the wearers if they wished their utterances to remain private. Although all the microphones were identical, only those worn by the selected pupils, usually four, were live and broadcast to a bank of receivers. This set up took place sometime before actual recording began so that participants became familiar with the presence of the equipment in their rooms. As well as the cameras, two or three researchers sat in the rooms making written records of the activities of the selected children. One of the findings that emerged from the subsequent detailed analysis of the data collected through this observation and recording was Nuthall's depiction of the classroom

being made up of three distinct, yet interrelated, worlds in which children live out their classroom lives (1999, 2007).

He identified the first of these worlds as the “public world”, the world visible to and run by the teacher; the one that most adults would see if they entered a classroom. The second world he described as the “semiprivate world of ongoing peer relationships” (2007, p. 84); a world with its own complexity of rituals and cultural practices through which children set up and sustain networks of friendships and in turn their social standing. Of particular interest here is his observation that participation in teacher directed learning activities is influenced by the social structures and processes found in this world and that some children are more adept than others at negotiating and capitalising on these aspects of their classroom culture (1999). Nuthall’s final world is the private world of the child’s mind where “individual thinking and learning takes place” (2007, p. 84). What occurred to me was that if I were to replicate Nuthall’s methods of data gathering then perhaps I could not only gain access to the semiprivate second world, the world where peer relationships are worked out and also where gendered subjectivities are socially, culturally, historically and politically constructed but also be able to, in some manner, document the ways in which these negotiated understandings of masculinities affect the ways the selected boys responded to learning opportunities.

There were significant differences between Nuthall’s *Project on Learning* and my research project. For example, I made no attempt to measure the pupil’s mastery of the academic content of the lessons observed or what experiences may have contributed to successful learning. Nor was there any need to negotiate or discuss the content of any of the lessons apart from an assurance that literacy programmes would occur regularly during the week of scheduled observations. Although Nuthall refers to sociocultural theory he relies heavily on cognitive theory to frame his investigations into the processes of teaching and learning.

Despite these differences I too was, very mindful, as indeed was Nuthall, of the need to build up respectful, collegial and cordial relationships with the teachers in whose classes I would be working (Rathgen, 2006). On one level I was a guest in their workplaces; a visitor who was making considerable demands on their goodwill and patience. As a classroom teacher with over twenty years experience of running a busy primary school classroom, I was aware of the physical and emotional demands of such labour without the extra pressure of a researcher working in the room. My admiration for the work of classroom teachers has not diminished and, if anything, is enhanced by their extending me the privilege of observing the complexities of the social settings in which their programmes are developed and sustained. At a professional level, I was reliant on the classroom teachers for their considerable knowledge of the children I would be observing. I needed them to feel comfortable enough with me to guide my selection of the pupils to take part in the focus group interviews and who would then be selected as the case study pupils. While I had made tentative selections based on preliminary impressions, my short term conclusions needed validating by the valuable insights they possessed as day by day they had built up their professional knowledge of their pupils. There were also important philosophical reasons for taking care to establish and maintain rapport with the classroom teachers. Paying particular attention to relationships within research settings is an important characteristic of feminist research ethics (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

For one week a combination of individual video recordings, individual audio recordings and live observations were made of the seven selected boys during their literacy programmes. In doing so I anticipated obtaining not only detailed records of the boys' interactions with other children but also examples of the prevailing discourses within the classroom through which they were actively constructing their subjectivities. During that same week, systematic observations were to be made of their participation in the class physical education programmes. I chose to observe

and gather data in these two settings, literacy and physical education, since literacy is a curriculum area stereotypically associated with girls while sport and physical education is stereotypically associated with boys. The intention was to gain as complete a picture as possible of the boys as they engaged in their learning. Within the classroom, this was not too difficult. Prior to the week of observations, recording equipment, consisting of four video cameras with wide angle lenses and individual broadcast microphones (microphones were worn by all pupils although only the microphones of the selected boys were live) were set up and introduced into the classes. Time was allowed for both the teachers and the children to become familiar with the recording equipment and my presence in the classroom as an observer. During the week of 'live' recordings, continuous recordings of the behaviour and language of the selected boys during their literacy periods were made by me, as the observer, and by the broadcast microphones and video cameras, which were situated in diagonally opposite corners of the classroom and focused specifically on the selected boys. In this way, both the public utterances and the private dealings of the selected boys were recorded.

Drawings

Drawing is given by Angela Veale (2005) as an example of an appropriate research tool to use with children when employing more creative, participatory research methodologies that acknowledge children as social actors who shape and, at the same time, are shaped by their surroundings, and who therefore have their own childhood cultures. When researching children and childhood it has been suggested that, as well as theorizing children as competent and confident (James, *et al.* 1998), it is important to recognize that children have different capabilities from adults and "may find other forms and means of self expression beyond the purely verbal" (p. 188). This cautionary note appears to be endorsed by Sheila Greene and Malcolm Hill who suggest that "the researcher must be open to the use of methods that are

suiting to children's level of understanding, knowledge, interests and particular location in the social world" (2005, p. 8). Apart from seeing the body as a valuable means of non-verbal communication in childhood Allison James, Chris Jenks and Alan Prout (1998) propose that children's art "opens up considerable methodological possibilities" (p. 189). They contend that through their schooling children are well used to drawing and expressing themselves on paper nonverbally and researchers would do well to consider utilising these abilities before routinely resorting to the more standard research methods of interviews and/or observations.

Melissa Freeman and Sandra Mathison (2009) remind us that in Western industrialized cultures we are surrounded by images situating us as both producers and consumers of their messages. They point out that images are "a rich source of data for understanding the social world and for representing our knowledge of that social world" (pp. 109-110) and that children use drawings as one way of making meaning of their worlds. Because of this they suggest that drawings can be a useful research method when working with children. In a detailed overview of research into children's drawings and in answer to questions of why children draw, Angela Anning and Kathy Ring (2004) proffer the explanation that "children use drawings as a tool for understanding and representing important aspects of their personal lived experiences of people, places and things" (p. 26). Very often children drawing is depicted as a simply a fun recreational activity that they choose to do both in and out of school. However, after a research project into young children's drawing that took place over a year, Sue Cox (2005) suggests that their work "is a constructive one. Through it, children purposely bring shape and order to their experience, and in so doing, their drawing activity is actively defining reality, rather than passively reflecting a 'given' reality" (p. 124).

Enthusiastic proponents of what are described as 'creative and visual' research methods, which include drawing and which are characterized as 'child-centred'

when children are involved, are David Gauntlett (2006), Brian Merriman (2009) and Suzanne Guerin (2006). An important facet of Gauntlett's rationale for using methods that involve participants "creatively making things themselves, and then reflecting upon what they have made" (Gauntlett & Holzwarth, 2006a, p. 82) that I find particularly appealing, given the theoretical perspectives of my project, are his references to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's critique of Western academic thought which "treats individuals as the sum of their brains" (p. 85). Gauntlett takes pains to point out that drawing involves hands, body and mind, thereby disrupting the mind/body dualism, and, commenting on art, Merleau-Ponty declares:

The Painter "takes his body with him" says Valéry. Indeed we cannot imagine how a mind could paint. It is by lending his body to the world that the artist changes the world into paintings (1961/1964, p. 162).

Gauntlett also finds merit in drawing or making things since as a process "it leads to a deeper and more reflective engagement" (2006, p. 7) because it is a more leisurely activity than face-to-face interviewing where participants are called upon to respond then and there. Merriman and Guerin (2006) see advantages in using drawing as a method of data collection because it is a fun, non-threatening activity that is popular with children and can be used an effective way to put them at their ease. It provides an opportunity for positive interactions between researchers and participants and its use does not require verbal or literacy skills. However, their primary reason is that it is a 'child-centred' method. They define child-centred as showing respect for and upholding the entitlement of children "to be considered as persons of value and persons with rights" (p. 49).

Esther Burkitt (2004) sounds a note of caution when drawing conclusions from children's art by pointing out that any meanings attributed to symbols can vary considerably depending on who has produced them and who is doing the

interpreting. She highlights the complexities involved and how elusive that meaning can be by observing that “children’s drawings may just be a matter of adherence to pictorial conventions and cultural rules (p. 568). When it comes to analysis of drawings Gauntlett shies away from researchers, the so-called ‘experts’, imposing their interpretation on a person’s work instead he proposes that it is better if the drawing is used “as a starting point for a discussion with the person” (2006a, p, 6). He does not advocate that the researcher just record what is said but insists that listening intently should come before any theorizing or prematurely coming to any conclusions.

David Buckingham (2009) has critiqued the use of ‘creative’ visual methods not just in media research but in social research more generally making particular references to research with children. He is particularly critical of Gauntlett’s claims that such ‘participatory’ methods are ‘empowering’ for participants enabling them to communicate their ideas “more directly, and with less interference or contamination from the researcher” (p. 633). He asks whether data produced in this way are any more truthful, authentic or accurate than other methods, whose ‘voice’ is represented and how such data should be analysed (2009). His answers are that drawings are constructions rather than transparent reflections of the real world and that the success of this method of generating data is dependent on the quality of the relationship and interactions between researcher and participants (2009). When the activities are carried out by adult in schools he maintains that there is a risk of obviating ‘empowerment’ claims by replicating the power dynamics characteristic of teacher-pupil relationships. He suggests that the apparent skirting of the need for verbal/literacy skills is replaced by the need for other skills depending on the chosen drawing medium (and we all know of children who describe themselves as no good at drawing). Buckingham is not in any way dismissive of the use of ‘creative’ visual methods, describing them as both “engaging and enjoyable” (p. 648). He does, however, emphasize the need for reflexivity about power relationships inherent in

any research relationships especially the constitution of “positions from which it is possible for participants to speak” (p. 648). He also stresses the requirement to take into account fully the social context in which methods were employed and from which the data were generated.

Fitting Drawing into the Research Process

My use of drawing as a research method did not emerge until I was working in the field in the first school. At a university seminar where I discussed my research while it was still in its early stages I was reflecting on the nature of my relationships with the participants when independent scholar, researcher and author, James T. Sears suggested that, rather than second guessing how I was being positioned by the children, I should have a discussion with them about how they viewed me and the work I was doing in their classroom. Acting on his idea what I actually did was to ask the children to draw pictures of me working with them. I invited each of the case study boys to do some drawing with me and they, in turn, chose some of their friends, both boys and girls, to join us. The drawing sessions took place in a quiet working area, with which the children were familiar, in the nearby school library. I supplied large sheets of newsprint (59 cm x 84 cm) and crayons although some preferred to draw with their own pencils. Only one or two of the children chose to work independently while the others chose to work in small groups. I then talked with them about their drawings, taped and then transcribed our conversations. Because the children were fully engaged, seemed to enjoy the activity (Buckingham, 2009) and then talked freely and enthusiastically with me about their completed drawings, I repeated the activity. This time I invited them to draw pictures of themselves at play in the school playground. My thinking was that their drawings and explanations would supplement my own playground observations and by roaming around the topic in this way, catching different glimpses by approaching it from different angles I would be able to construct a detailed picture (Richardson & St

Pierre, 2005). The drawing activities were repeated in the second school producing a total of eleven drawings in all.

Observations

In their most basic form, observations have been described as methodically taking notes while looking at and listening to people, and recording their behaviour, activities and so on (Cohen et al. 2011). Louis Cohen and his colleagues suggest that observations are very flexible but it is now common practice for the process to take place in education in “naturally occurring social situations” (p. 456) such as classrooms and playgrounds. By thus avoiding second-hand reporting they argue that the resultant data are potentially more valid or authentic. Observations can vary from highly structured to unstructured with the role of the researcher ranging from a participant who is accepted as a full member of the group being studied to an observer who, by remaining quite aloof from the group, is a virtual spectator. As I was working from the perspective of poststructuralist feminism, my use of in situ observations needed to be as wide-ranging, unstructured, open-ended and naturalistic as possible.

I did not know in advance precisely what it was I would be looking for when I commenced my fieldwork beyond wanting the opportunity “to observe participants in their natural setting, their everyday social settings and their everyday behaviour in them” (Cohen et al. 2011, p. 465). What I needed to produce were rich ‘thick descriptions’ (Geertz, 1973); data comprised of detailed observational notes to sit alongside other data in which the children’s own meanings and interpretations would be to the fore. By so doing I was able to build up a comprehensive picture of how these particular young children constructed, maintained and policed their gendered subjectivities. In generating such data I could not avoid participation in the children’s worlds, in their natural settings. Indeed, it has been suggested that to

study the social world a researcher has to be a part of it and hence all social research involves aspects of participant observation (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

In a 2005 review of participant observation Barbara B. Kawulich describes participant observation as learning about the activities of the group of people being studied in their natural setting by observing and participating in their activities and she notes its increasing use in educational research. She lists one of the main advantages of this method as being able to produce the sought after rich descriptions through getting access to the 'behind the scenes' world of those being studied (which Nuthall alludes to in his 2007 *The Hidden Lives of Learners*). Kawulich (2005) identifies a major potential shortcoming of participant observation as researcher bias:

"Participant observation is conducted by a biased human who serves as the instrument for data collection; the researcher must understand how his/her gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, and theoretical approach may affect observation, analysis, and interpretation" (p. 5). As an example, she suggests that rather than recording full descriptions of behaviours, observations may consist of little more than the imposition of predetermined categories which arise from the observer's theoretical inclinations. I avoided this by making anecdotal notes capturing as much information as I could rather than fitting the happenings into some sort of prepared checklist.

Sharan B. Merriam (2009) draws attention to the difficulties inherent in participant observation describing it variously as ambiguous, a 'schizophrenic activity', a marginal position that is tricky to keep going and a source of anxiety. She describes the problem as maintaining the delicate balance required to participate in but not become totally caught up by the activity in order to retain enough detachment to carry out the intended observations and analysis. She accepts that in qualitative research so-called objectivity and detachment are replaced by varying degrees of subjectivity and interaction but admits that the difficulty then lies in finding out the

affect that the researcher has had on the activity and the behaviour of those being observed. She also very astutely observes that in the end the role of participant observer is limited to that which is allocated by the participants. Others have gone further describing the term 'participant observation' as an oxymoron indicating the impossibility of simultaneous objective detachment and emotional involvement (DeWalt & Dewalt, 2011). While acknowledging this ever-present tension, they argue it can be a creative process as researcher learns to step back from immersion and involvement to the reflection on and analysis of data as well as the effects of researcher positionality in the research process. In this way reflexivity can acknowledge the tension from the perspective of feminist methodologies, for instance, which recognizes that personal involvement is a necessary condition for researchers and participants to come to know and to be known by each other, and thus to learn from each other.

Playground Observations

During the time that I was in each school I spent as much time observing in the school playground as I could (given the constraints of juggling work commitments with fieldwork). After initial orientation, for instance figuring out the natural habitats of the younger children, I focussed on the games played by the children of each class and in particular on the activities of the case study boys. In both schools the children played predominantly in the area of the playground adjacent to their classrooms, although not always with their own classmates, so positioning myself with pen and paper on the verandah gave me a good view of events. I made brief notes on the spot—for fleshing out later—recording times, dates, what the activity was, where it was being played, who was involved, what materials or equipment were being used and as much as I could about the children's behaviour together with specific actions of the case study boys and, when I was close enough to hear, any comments made by the children.

From time to time I perambulated in the area but I was inevitably distracted by children who positioned me as a playground supervisor, a figure of authority, and sought my help for one reason or another. Even when stationary I was occasionally approached although I was never actually asked what it was I was doing. On each of these occasions emotional involvement won out over detached observation especially when the children appeared to be upset. I listened sympathetically offering comfort and/or advice while trying not to become too involved and distracted from the task in hand. Even when the children were not upset I found myself quietly listening to their news, nodding and commenting, valuing each interaction as potentially rapport building and perhaps lessening of the distance between insider and outsider.

Data Analysis

In their definition of qualitative research as a “field of inquiry in its own right” that cuts across “disciplines, fields and subject matters” Norman K. Denzin & Yvonna S. Lincoln (2003, p. 3), in an acknowledgment of the complexity that this entails, position the researcher as *bricoleur*. They describe a *bricoleur* as someone who, in order to make sense of the phenomena that is the focus of the study, makes use of a wide range of “tools, methods, and techniques of representation and interpretation” (p. 5) so as to assemble a montage, a *bricolage*, that adequately represents the meanings that are constructed by the research participants as they go about their everyday lives. At times they liken researchers’ montages to patchwork quilts where meaning and reality are constructed using a variety of methods such as field notes, interviews, memos and conversations through a process of piecing together “different voices, different perspectives, points of view, angles of vision (p. 7). My approach to data analysis sits within this tradition. As well as consulting work by discourse theorists such as Michel Foucault (1982, 1969/ 2006), Norman Fairclough (2003), James Gee (2005) and Rebecca Rogers (2011), I studied accounts of data analysis from disciplines as diverse as psychology, geography, linguistics, sports

sciences, literacy and education gleaned from each whatever insights I needed to assemble a workable approach to making sense of my own data.

Despite the widespread use of different approaches to discourse analysis as tools for analysing research data a recurrent theme in the literature is that accounts of research projects all too often lack both an adequate explanation of the theoretical and methodological constructs behind the approach as well as a coherent and thorough description of the actual techniques and strategies used in the analysis (Norman Fairclough, Phil Graham, Jay Lemke & Ruth Wodak, 2004; Linda Graham, 2005; Virginia Braun & Victoria Clarke, 2006; David Bloome et. al. 2008). This account provides an overview of my understanding of discourse analysis as it relates to my project leading on to details of how I used the technique to analyse my data.

In *Doing Discourse Analysis: Methods for Studying Action in Talk and Text*, Linda A. Wood and Rolf O. Kroger (2000) note that along with an increasing interest in discourse analysis there is considerable confusion about just what it is and what its methods are and that this arises, in part, because there are multiple positions and definitions of what can be regarded as discourse. Margaret Wetherell and Jonathan Potter (1987) have defined discourse very broadly as including all forms of both written texts and spoken interactions; a definition that Ian Parker (1990) describes as unhelpful and difficult for a researcher to use when faced with a mass of data. Wood & Kroger prefer Potter's 1997 explanation of discourse analysis as a commitment to the study of "texts and talk in social practice" (p. 146) which goes beyond that which Terry Threadgold (2000) has characterised as a more technicist, decontextual, linguistic analysis, with its apolitical focus on the repertoire of sentences, structures, grammatical rules and syntax and how these elements cohere into the discourses employed by participants in a specific setting. Unlike this form of conversation analysis, Potter's concept of discourse analysis seeks to recognize and interrogate closely the interactions and social practices effected within and between people in

their everyday lives; their ways of doing things as they constitute their social realities through discourse. This is more akin to Fairclough's description of his approach to discourse analysis which he identifies as a version of 'critical discourse analysis' which also has the broader aim of understanding better how societies work in order maximize their social benefits and minimize or preferably eradicate their negative effects and:

is based upon the assumption that language is an irreducible part of social life, dialectically interconnected with other elements of social life, so that social analysis and research always has to take an account of language (2003, p. 2).

Wood & Kroger (2000) go on to elaborate on discourse analysis as both a methodological concept and a theoretical construct in that, as a means of analysing social life, it is comprised not only of a set of methods but also of a perspective on the role/power of language in peoples' lives, day by day, and the view that their social realities are constructed through language. Central to this position is the understanding that it is by the means of our talk, our cultural practices, that we shape our worlds, our understandings of ourselves and others and our positions within those socially constructed realities. According to Edward E. Sampson (1993) discourse analysts do not set out to discover "truth in some abstract, universal sense" (p. 1225), but their search represents a desire to reveal the discursive processes whereby certain knowledge comes to be regarded as true while other ideas come to be seen as untrue. Accordingly, analysis aimed at understanding the significance of what is being said must attend not only to the immediate situation but also to the broader cultural context.

The function of discourse analysis within this theoretical perspective is described very clearly by James Paul Gee and Judith L. Green (1998) as an investigation of what it is that social actors within a particular setting need to:

know, produce, and interpret to participate in socially appropriate ways. By means of such questions, the analyst can examine, for example, what members construct together, what they hold each other accountable to, and how they view the actions of others. In this way, the analyst identifies the principles guiding members' practices within and across contexts as well as the types of worlds, identities, and actions they construct and display in and through their talk and actions (p. 125).

When located within an ethnographic perspective Gee and Green (1998) regard discourse analysis as an exploration of patterns of interaction within a social setting, be it a classroom, school playground or other educational setting, which is guided by a focus on the culturally constructed dialogue that social actors engage in. Significantly, this 'dialogue' may take the form of communication or action. This particular conception of discourse analysis as well as seeing language as social practice goes beyond the content of the verbal interactions to consider the performative dimension of language. Recognizing that language is a key constitutive feature of aspects of social life such as identities and gender differences, this involves asking what functions, what actions are the people doing both in and through their "conversation, narratives, explanations, accounts and anecdotes" (Wetherell & Potter, 1992, p.3) in addition to what their talk is about in this particular setting. David Bloome and Caroline Clark (2006) employ the term 'discourse-in-use' to elaborate on this idea describing it as a concentration on language and cultural practices that attends not only to how people relate to each other and the means they use in such exchanges, but also includes consideration of the broader cultural, societal and historical backdrops of these interactions. Specifically, this involves asking "who is doing what with whom, to whom, when, where, and how?" (p. 227) leading to careful study of what has been achieved or created through the interactions. Since I am focussing on gender identity issues in an educational setting, my analysis needs to include examination of the multi-layered ways in which subjectivities are constituted through talk, text and action across various sites of learning.

Whereas many other methodological approaches to social science research, situated within a more positivist paradigm and perhaps reflecting primarily twentieth century white, western, heterosexual male attitudes, or in other words patriarchal values, may involve a search for general laws or principles with which to describe aspects of society and in many ways seeking to mirror those that might be used consistently to account for phenomena in the physical world, discourse analysis embraces uncertainty and variability. Ideally, the discourse analyst tunes into multiple voices and strives through analysis to construct a multi-vocal research narrative.

Of particular relevance to my project, framed as it is by a poststructuralist feminist perspective, is Nancy L. Leech and Anthony J. Onwuegbuzie's 2008 identification of post- structuralism and the continental discourse analysis associated with Michel Foucault as one of the major traditions of discourse analysis. They characterize it as having less to do with discourse as a form of social interaction and with having as its prime focus "how a discourse, or set of statements, comes to constitute objects and subjects" (p. 592). In contrast to the abstractness of linguistics, discourses for Foucault are material practices. They "are not, as one might expect, a mere intersection of things and words" but are "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault, 2006/1969, p. 53-54). Foucault's notion of the subject, and hence the processes of subjectivation, moved from regarding the subject as relatively passive, and subject to social coercion and regulation, to a model of a more politically active individual.

I would say that if I am now interested in how the subject constitutes itself in an active fashion through practices of the self, these practices are nevertheless not something invented by the individual himself. They are models that he finds in his culture and are proposed, suggested, imposed upon him by his culture, his society, and his social group (1997, p. 291).

Consequently my discourse analysis is situated within a Foucauldian theoretical framework which, rather than involving a search for abstract rules or some universal meanings or truths, includes an examination of the contextual role of discourse. In my project discourse analysis involves searching for the ways in which language is implicated in the formation of knowledge including the children's knowledge of themselves as gendered individuals. It explores the ways in which the children construct their understandings of themselves and their worlds and how each one becomes a person in any particular context. It includes searching texts of various kinds, both verbal and non-verbal, in order to identify what it is that the children say and do as they take up available subject positions and are positioned by others. It involves looking for and identifying any signs of the underlying discourses in operation as well as their accompanying social practices. Further, my analysis identifies the ways in which these processes of subjectivation either re/produce or withstand prevailing discursive practices and their associated current distributions of power. Also, since discourses are unstable and identities are fluid and always in a state of becoming, my analysis looks for underlying contradictions and listens for the silences or what is not being said and why. Consideration is given to differences and marginality, to who gets listened to, who gets censured and why, and who is benefitting most from the current arrangements (Allan Edwards & James Skinner, 2009).

Nowhere does Foucault set out any clear stages or research strategies let alone the specifics of carrying out discourse analysis which is not really surprising since important components of his work were to question certainty, to encourage thinking otherwise, to unsettle equilibrium and to shy away from prescriptions (1983/1988, 1984/1988). However, a number of researchers have produced helpful guides to using Foucauldian discourse analysis which consist of a number steps or stages to be followed from selecting text for analysis through to the connections between discourses, subject positions and subjectification. My approach to discourse analysis

within a Foucauldian perspective begins with Linda J. Graham's observation that text for analysis may include "movement, behaviour, performance, gestures, art, symbols, text and so on" (2011, p. 668) involving as it does analysis of transcripts from focus group interviews, children's drawings, transcripts of comments the children made to me about their drawings, playground and classroom observations and video recordings of selected classroom programmes. Graham stresses that Foucauldian discourse analysis involves looking at all forms of signification not so much for what they say as for what they do; how they produce the very objects of which they speak.

The steps I followed, which are outlined below, are informed by the six stages¹⁴ of analysing data outlined by Carla Willig (2013) which she in turn acknowledges are a more concise method of Ian Parker's original 20 step analysis (Langdridge & Hagger-Johnson, 2013, pp. 482-3). Willig notes "these stages allow the researcher to map some of the discursive resources used in a text and the subject positions they contain, and to explore their implications for subjectivity and practice" (Willig, 2013, p.131). Judith Butler's analysis of the power of speech *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* provided valuable insight about how to get started and what to look for in my data. She contends that it is through forms of address that the body is socially defined and thus becomes accessible. This is an elemental constitution of the body rather than a discovery of an a priori existence –

Thus, to be addressed is not merely to be recognized for what one already is, but to have the very term conferred by which the recognition of existence becomes possible. One comes to "exist" by virtue of this fundamental dependency on the address of the Other. One "exists" not only by virtue of being recognized, but, in a prior sense, by being recognizable. (1997, p. 5).

¹⁴ Stage 1: highlight transcript for all references to discursive object. Stage 2: locate discursive constructions within wider cultural discourses. Stage 3: specify action-orientation of text. Stage 4: identify various subject positions. Stage 5: consider practical implications. Stage 6: identify "ways-of-being" made possible.

Social regularity through social interaction and the meanings socially, culturally, historically and politically constructed then influence individual's understanding of themselves as gendered beings and thus makes it possible to recognize others and to make the self recognizable:

1. What I set about doing was searching for all the instances in the data, including interview transcripts, field notes, video recordings, children's drawings, and classroom or playground observation notes, of the children addressing each other, recognizing themselves and others as boys or girls, and distinguishing themselves from others, both verbally and non-verbally, and I interpreted these instances as units or components of the discursive practices through which gender relations were being played out in each of the research settings.
2. I noted, using different coloured highlighter pens, the discursive resources that were being drawn upon by the children as they re/produced their meanings of being boys and being girls. I made notes in the margins of transcripts or on Post-it® Notes recording, as I went, of the different discourses I identified, possible links to wider societal discourses, questions I had about the statements (Foucault, 1969/2006) and possible links to the literature, both theoretical and methodological, in which I had immersed myself (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).
3. I gave careful consideration to each discourse asking a series of interrelated questions about the children's understandings of being boys and being girls that were afforded to them within each discourse:
 - a. What subject positions are available to them as boys or girls in this discourse and how are these positions regulated?
 - b. What do they think can/cannot be said or done from these positions?
 - c. What are the consequences for them of their subjectivities being constructed in these ways?

Chapter 4

“I don’t want to be a freak!” Exploring children’s negotiations of gendered storylines

Correct membership of the social order entails being able to read situations correctly such that what is obvious to everyone else is also obvious to you. It involves knowing how to be positioned and to position oneself as a member of the group who knows and takes for granted what other people know and take for granted in a number of different settings (Bronwyn Davies, 2000, p. 22).

I am referring to *story*, something we encounter in childhood and live with all our lives. Without the ability, to tell or live prescribed stories we lose the ability to make sense of our lives (Margaret Mahy, 1996, p. 137).

The quotation in the title of this chapter is a comment made by one of the boys during a focus group discussion (Shene, Focus Group 6) that was centred on the story *William’s Doll* written by Charlotte Zolotow. We were looking at an illustration of a toy store in the book and the children were discussing which toy they would choose if their grandmother had offered to buy one for them. While the boys happily nominated a Lego car, a yacht, an electric train set, a Pokémon, a puppy or a spooky animal, when I asked why they wouldn’t choose the doll one boy described it as “too girly”, another stated “because I’m not a girl” and one said very firmly, and with a frown, “I don’t want to be a freak!”¹⁵

¹⁵ And yet, this is what forms the central premise of *William’s Doll* — what happens when a boy wants a doll? In describing her thinking and her motivation for writing the book, Zolotow (http://www.charlottezolotow.com/willilams_doll.htm) recalls an incident that happened when she was parenting her own young children. She had taken her son, Stephen, to play in Washington Square Park. There they encountered a small boy who wanted a rag-doll. She overheard the boy’s father say, *oh get him a gun instead*. She was immediately incensed by the father’s comment. Her own experience told her that it was customary

Published in 1972 and related in a very gentle manner, the simple story tells of how William wanted a doll to hug, to cradle in his arms, to take to the park, to put to bed and to kiss goodnight. The boy next door and his brother call him a creep and a sissy. At first his father buys him a basketball and then, despite his obvious proficiency with the basketball, as his desire for a doll persists, he buys William an electric train. Many hours of enjoyable, imaginative play with the train set do not stop William wanting a doll. He is not even satisfied with a workbench with which he can build things. The story ends with a visit by William's grandmother who, understanding his longing, gets him a doll and explains to his upset father ("He's a Boy! ... Why does he need a doll") that playing with the doll will be good practice for taking care of a baby when he eventually becomes a father.

The readings and discussions of this story and *Jump* by Michelle Magorian (discussed in detail later in this chapter) were undertaken in order to explore the children's understandings about being boys and being girls. Then, based on the range of ideas that emerged, I planned to select a small number of boys for closer study as case study pupils. Bronwyn Davies (2003) argues that through children's responses to stories, researchers can explore how young children make sense of the complexities of their social worlds and, in particular, gain access to their understandings about masculinities and femininities. Importantly, she points out that there is more to this process than mere linguistics, that the physical body comes into play as understandings about gender become embodied as "each child's body takes on the knowledge of maleness or femaleness through its practices (2003, p. 14). I was interested in more than just the children's understandings about being

for many fathers not to have much to do with the raising of their children. She believed fathers were not just missing out on the pleasure of being with young children but that they had little understanding of them. She considered that such ignorance gave rise to the erroneous belief that it was somehow 'unmanly' for boys to play with dolls or stuffed toys; these became the ideas that she went on to explore in *William's Doll*.

masculine and feminine. I wanted to gain an insight into the processes through which the children came to these understandings. For example, what discursive and embodied practices were utilised in the processes of becoming boys and becoming girls (Paechter, 2007)? Davies argues that gender also needs to be understood as communalistic and political. She maintains that since gender is publicly owned and requires “collective activity to maintain the gendered social order ... individuals *can* deviate, but their deviations will give rise to *category-maintenance work* around the gender boundaries (2003, p. 31; original emphasis). This chapter gives details of the meaning-making processes such as these that the children made use of during our focus group discussions as well as the children’s relational ideas about being girls and being boys.

In contesting the notions such as gender being biologically fixed and unalterable and that we are stable, unified, rational, coherent, knowing, autonomous and ahistorical individuals (St. Pierre, 2000), this chapter explores how gender discursively regulates the children’s understandings of themselves and others. Through the use of gendered storylines it examines how children interact with texts, how they read and interpret the storylines, how they understand them and how they express them. I examine how they gain pleasure from them, desire them and the differing ways in which they take them up as their own leading to multiple, fluid subjectivities. The aim is to understand better the technologies (Foucault, 1988) or techniques that come into play as the children act on themselves to transform themselves into desirable, recognizable gendered beings. Specifically, I use a feminist poststructuralist approach, together with elements of queer theory, to unpick and make sense of the children’s talk and bodily practices. I analyse how the children make use of various discourses in their social and political construction of gender, including how discourses of heteronormativity were drawn on at times by the children in constituting their gendered subjectivities and how power permeates the children’s relationships and is utilised in the construction and regulation of a particular

gendered social order. The analysis examines the ways in which the children worked to construct themselves as certain sorts of boys and girls, which sorts of boys or girls were positioned as 'desirable' and 'normal', what happened when attempts were made to resist or subvert these norms and how gender norms were re/produced, maintained and negotiated interactively. What the analysis also shows is the complexities involved in the constitution of subjectivities in that there were contradictions and inconsistencies as the children actively constituted themselves through talk and practices.

The children frequently positioned themselves as members of one of two available categories and by doing so they were also identifying what they were not. Gender was thus being constituted through language as a pair of binary opposites (Davies, 2006) with comments about what was appropriate for each such as:

- | | |
|--|----------------------------|
| "Dolls aren't for boys." | (Shene, Focus Group 6) |
| "Boys aren't supposed to have dolls." | (Anglerton, Focus Group 1) |
| "It's really weird for boys to have dolls because dolls are made for girls." | (Shene, Focus Group 6) |
| "Only girls like dolls." | (Anglerton, Focus Group 1) |
| "Normally girls like dolls and doll houses." | (Anglerton, Focus Group 2) |

The children had little difficulty naming what was appropriate for each of the categories of girls and boys. Games for boys included volleyball, soccer, rugby, cricket and running around. Although boys could not have dolls, teddy bears were acceptable and games such as tennis could be played by both girls and boys. It appears here that boys were collectively positioning themselves as active, sporty individuals which also re/produces a culturally dominant discourse of masculinity in Aotearoa New Zealand. In addition, reference was made to the common practice of fathers initiating their sons into the predominately, but not exclusively, male

world of sport (Ferguson, 2004; 2012). For example, during a discussion of *William's Doll* two of the boys made comments about boys and sports:

- G.F.: Why did his father give him a basketball?
Ash: Um, so he would stop thinking about dolls and play sports.
G.F.: Why would he want him to do that?
Ash: Um, well, because he thinks that dolls are a bit too important to him.
G.F.: What do you think B12?
B12: Um, I think about his dad likes sports, so maybe his, maybe his dad likes sports, and he might like sports, and he might, and he would stop thinking about it and he'll say "I've stop thinking about dolls, dad".
G.F.: Why would he want him to stop thinking about dolls?
B12: Because, because then he'll get brain control.

(Anglerton, Focus Group 1)

To deviate from accepted cultural practices when it comes to gender is to lose control of one's brain, to think the unthinkable, and apparently the way to regain control is to conform to the dominant cultural practices. An interesting link can be made here between masculinity and rationality. The mind/body dualism of Cartesian thought appears relevant here as masculinity is being constructed as rational and unemotional. This contrasts with William's yearning for the doll which is interpreted as being obsessional and unreasonable. His fantasy of caring for a doll which involves being empathetic and nurturing, since these are stereotypically associated with females, is called into question as being a gender-inappropriate way of behaving. Since sporting activities provide opportunities for boys to display gender-appropriate qualities such as physical strength, competitiveness and aggression, it is deemed to be more suitable for William and justification for his father's level-headed actions.

Davies (2003) states that for some children "their assigned gender category is a straitjacket they have a lot of trouble wearing" (p. 132) and how deviation from the norm results in 'category-maintenance work'. However, there did appear to me to be

a measure of fluidity, even ambiguity as the children wrestled with particular relational discourses of gender, such as toys for boys being separate from girls' toys since boys are what girls are not and vice versa, in order to fashion themselves in certain desirable ways and distance themselves from less desirable subject positions. At various times in our focus group discussions both B12 and Ash labelled dolls as toys for girls yet admitted playing with them:

G. F.: What do you think when you say it's only for girls? Would you like a doll to play with?

Ash: Well sometimes. I sometimes make up imaginary friends, and sometimes imaginary dolls.

G. F.: So, sometimes you play with dolls?

B12: Yeah, sometimes I do, but sometimes I'm not really up to that now because Pokémon is my favourite thing. (Anglerton, Focus Group 1)

However, Ash's dolls were fantasy and in B12's case the doll was not his but belonged to his sister:

B12: Yeah, because my sisters got one, and I feed it, and it's called Chou Chou. It's one of those baby born ones 'cos it takes a water bottle, a little water bottle um came with it, and you can feed it water.

(Anglerton, Focus Group 1)

Carrie Paechter (2007) describes children during their first years at primary school as being "uncertain about the constancy of gender" (p. 68) but very aware of school as a place where it is important to establish themselves appropriately as either a girl or a boy. She maintains that activities and patterns of play acceptable at home may be denounced by classmates to such an extent that "aspects of the self that are considered unproblematic elsewhere" (p. 61) may have to be negotiated if not actually quashed. This process is evident in the comments of Ash and especially B12 when he talks about playing with his sister's doll. B12 and Ash played with dolls, presumably at their homes, but did not actually own them which is subtly different

from the perceived unintelligibility of a boy having a doll which was variously described as “stupid”, “not cool”, “funny” and sniggered about or openly laughed at. For example, when I first introduced the story to one of the Shene focus groups one of the boys asked if William was a boy and when I replied that he was, he started to snigger, presumably in disbelief. On another occasion William’s performance of gender nonconformity in wanting a doll provoked giggling from some of the Anglerton boys. Such moments illustrate what David McInnes (2008) describes as a ‘double movement’. By positioning William as Other, as deviant, as a figure of fun or someone who has gone wrong, the boys establish what they constitute as the ‘norm’ for them in this particular space at this time. In this movement what can and cannot be known is simultaneously recognized. A boy with a doll is recognized as unintelligible, as that that cannot be, while a boy as sporty, active and competitive is authenticated. Openly teasing William by calling him a sissy, as the boys in the story do, according to McInnes, manages him “so as not to cause further trouble—named, shamed and tamed” (p. 108). The process of establishing the norm can also be less obvious.

At another point (Anglerton, Focus Group 1) when Ash challenged the assertion that playing with a doll was “quite a girly thing” by saying “no, actually I quite like dolls” he was reminded, by one of the other boys, of what had been established as ‘normal’ within the context of our discussion, rather than roundly condemned for his admission: “Yeah, but um, *normally* girls like dolls and doll houses”. There were clear limits that were being discursively constructed around how to be a boy and Ash was in danger of breaching them. By admitting that he quite liked dolls, Ash was on dangerous ground. He was positioning himself beyond what was being constituted as appropriate for boys. He was quietly yet firmly reminded of what was considered ‘normal’; that dolls and doll houses were not for boys. However, Ash was not to be deterred by the power of the discourses circulating here for when we

examined William's father's motivation for buying alternatives to the doll such as the basketball and the train he had this to say:

- Ash: Um, I think he's a bit angry, and he's lying because he bought them just so he would forget about the doll.
- G.F.: Why is it important do you think, for him to forget about the doll?
From what his father said?
- Ash: Um, because, um, because, um, he thinks dolls are mostly girls' things.
- G.F.: Okay...
- Ash: And girls would only have them.
- G.F.: Oh, do you think that?
- Ash: Um, no, not really, I think any, well, my friend's teacher said to my friend that you're the boss of yourself, so he should be the boss of himself, and tell his mum and dad that.

(Anglerton, Focus Group 1)

By echoing the teacher's words, Ash has cited the discursive notion of the liberal humanist self as the self-determining, self-managing subject with freedom to choose what kind of individual it is possible to be (Charles, 2010). At first his mention of the right of the individual to choose appears not to be a gender issue but in distancing himself from the authority figure of William's father and calling into question his mendacity Ash, on behalf of William, resists the power of the storyline's dominant masculinity embodied by William's father, brother and the boy next door. The majority of the children in the focus groups, especially the boys, had no trouble endorsing the actions of the father as justified in maintaining the 'correct' division of the world into masculine and feminine. In effect, by giving approval to William's non-hegemonic behaviour Ash illustrates the oft quoted notion of Foucault "Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (1976/1998, p.95). While his endorsement of William's alternative masculinity seems a little hesitant, "um, no, not really", Ash does argue in favour of tolerance towards displays of non-hegemonic masculinity. Davies (2003) regards such comments as being "about the moral order—about the way the world is or ought to be" (p. 29). Utilising Davies'

perspective it is possible to explain Ash's comments about the right to choose as coming from a white, middle-class position within a liberal humanist discourse that champions individual rights and responsibilities. When Ash condemns the father's attempts at category maintenance work this rights discourse appears to take precedence over other gender discourses available to him that label boys and girls, and men and women as binary opposites.

The importance of paying attention to minority voices such as Ash's is emphasized by Barrie Thorne in her 2002 contribution to *The Jossey-Bass Reader on Gender in Education* in which she poses the question "Do girls and boys have different cultures?" She warns against a tendency on the part of researchers investigating gender relations among children, and she includes herself among them, to view their data "like an explorer shining a flashlight on *selected* parts of a dark cave" (p. 132; my emphasis). She notes a bias in favour of reporting "the most visible and dominant — and a silencing and marginalisation of the others" (p.132). She urges researchers to aim for more insightful interpretations of their data by attending to the complexities, contradictions and ambiguities evident in the contexts within which gender relations are performed. Attending to all the voices in the data from this particular interview does reveal gender being discursively constituted in a variety of ways.

For example, on a number of occasions some of the girls challenged the notion of the inappropriateness of boys having dolls. The boundary that was being placed around what it meant to be a boy was less rigid and more open to debate according to several of the girls. Clare Bartholomaeus (2012) commented that some of the girls in her research positioned themselves within a discourse supporting greater gender flexibility and in her 2005 discussion of Raewyn Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity, Mindy Blaise notes that while other forms of masculinity are regulated by hegemonic masculinity, a variety of subordinated femininities are able to be performed. She maintains that the upshot of this is that "actual femininities in our

society are more diverse than masculinities, allowing for a greater range of gender variation to exist among girls (p. 61). This could explain why girls like Xena support greater flexibility towards gender in general:

G. F.: What about, what about dolls?
John: Um, only girls have them, but boys can have teddy bears.
Nick: Yeah.
Xena: Hey my cousin Jacob (pseudonym) has a doll, and he's a boy.
G. F.: And what do you think about that, Xena?
Xena: I think it's okay for boys to have dolls.
G. F.: What do you think Ana?
Ana: It's really okay, I don't care.
Nick: Mmm...
G. F.: Is it okay for boys like William to have dolls?
Nick: (Sniggers)
G. F.: Why not?
Nick: Because that's not cool.
Xena: My brother has a doll.
Nick: (Laughs)
G. F.: Why don't you think that's okay, Nick?
Nick: 'Cos they're boys.
John: Mmm.
G. F.: And, what's a boy, what toys should boys have?
Nick: Umm, teddy.
G. F.: A teddy? Okay...
Xena: But that's still like dolls.

(Shene, Focus Group 5)

While not completely ruling out soft toys for boys, according to these boys they had to be certain kinds of toys¹⁶ for boys to play with in order to be acceptable and to

¹⁶ Teddy bears, despite their soft, cute and cuddly appearance, have undeniably masculine associations and are constituted as acceptable toys for boys. Their origins, said to have arisen from a 1902 Clifford K. Berryman cartoon depicting the manly hunting pursuits of United States President Theodore 'Teddy' Roosevelt and his sportsmanlike behaviour in sparing a bear cub, were once described by Donna Haraway (1984) as a symbol of 20th century patriarchy bolstering the image of man as having dominion over women, children and animals. Historically, more recent popular stories for children with bears as central characters, such as Rupert, Paddington and Sooty, relate the escapades and mishaps of endearing, typecast male characters that embody qualities such as being adventurous, mischievous and/or cheeky.

maintain the appropriate gender boundaries. In our discussion these two boys were able to make use of William's deviation from the norm as a way of clarifying how to get gender right. His transgression reinforced or clarified where the gender boundary lay for them. The children in all the focus groups had no trouble in explaining the teasing that William experienced because he wanted a doll. If a boy fails to perform masculinity satisfactorily it makes him like a girl. One boy went as far as suggesting that "when he plays with dolls he's gonna be a girl" and this then resulted in his being teased and called a 'sissy' (Shene, Focus Group 5). Davies (2003) identifies teasing as an example of 'category-maintenance work' employed to maintain a category as meaningful when a 'deviant' individual jeopardizes it. Although the teasing was understood, it was not always condoned and talking about it revealed further category demarcations, but demarcations open to challenge:

Xena: But I don't think it's nice.

G. F.: Pardon?

Xena: I don't think it's nice, though.

G.F.: What don't you think is nice?

John: Um, because...

Xena: The [boy] next door calling him a sissy

G. F.: Okay, what were you going to say John?

John: Um, well, because a sissy is a girl.

G. F.: What does that mean? I'm not sure.

John: Um, well, it's like when they say you're a sissy that means you're like a girl.

G. F.: What does that mean? How would you feel if someone called you a sissy?

John: I'd go round there and beat them up.

Nick: Me too!

Xena: Like, if I called you a sissy, you would beat me up?

John: No, not girls, only boys.

(Shene, Focus Group 5)

According to John and Nick, one way of positioning yourself as a proper boy, of asserting your masculinity, should it be called into question, is by resorting to violence. Each repetition of such discursive processes, where meanings are co-constructed, acts to ensure that the boy/girl dualism is maintained and the gender order preserved with key signifiers of masculinity as strong and aggressive and femininity as fragile, remaining intact. Of course some, including Judith Butler (1997), would characterize teasing or name-calling as 'hate speech' and as violent in effect as blows to the body. In *Excitable Speech* Butler describes how the blows inflicted in everyday interactions by name-calling, as a way of excluding or denigrating, shape both the subjectivities of the addressee and the person doing the addressing. Drawing on Butler, David McInnes (2008) identifies three players in such scenarios. First there is the declarer, then the declared and thirdly, the witnesses. In a sense we were positioned as witnesses to the name-calling in *William's Doll*. By calling William a 'sissy' his brother and the boy next door declare him to be unintelligible "as not making the right kind of sense of a body/gender alignment" (McInnes, 2008, p. 97) while at the same time shoring up as intelligible their positions as masculine. Interestingly, at this point in the story the illustration cites and inscribes the dominant discourse of boys as sporty by showing them dressed in tennis whites with rackets in hand and in doing so visually shoring up their masculine intelligibility. In hindsight by interrogating the children's interpretation of this scenario John and Nick were able to position themselves as Other to the unintelligible William and shore up what was to them their 'authentic' more dominant form of masculinity.

The complex processes at work in shaping subjectivities also became apparent in another focus group discussion when one of the boys expressed disapproval of the teasing. Rather than rejecting William as a freak, one of the boys seems to identify with him in his predicament:

Pokémon: Not nice.

G.F.: What's not nice?
Pokémon Saying 'Sissy, Sissy'
 I think he's, I think he's hurting.

(Anglerton, Focus Group 2)

Despite apparently empathizing with William at this stage of the story and possibly contesting the knowledge about how to get gender 'right' as constructed by the more dominant voices in the group, Pokémon goes on to ultimately resist the alternative storyline of a boy with a doll, rather than dolls being the preserve of girls alone, by describing it as "bad". It is possible to interpret this in different ways. On the surface it seems that Pokémon had positioned himself and been positioned within the discourse that dominated in the course of our discussion. It was taken for granted by others in the group that "dolls are made for girls". Knowing that he was not a girl and seeking to be correctly recognized and accepted, it could be argued that Pokémon submitted to the accepted way of doing gender in this particular context. Paradoxically he was simultaneously yielding to the dominant discursive practices in this setting as well as mastering the practice of constructing himself according to the model available to him in this social grouping (Davies, 2006). In a Foucauldian sense, the known order, the order taken for granted in this setting, amounts to a 'regime of truth' — "Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true..." (Foucault, 1980a, p. 131). In other words, in any given setting, certain ways of being and acting are taken as 'truths', discursively supported by relations amongst individuals and groups, and possibly by institutions such as schools, thus forming part of the discursive regime within which children learn to regulate themselves as they negotiate their understandings of themselves as gendered beings.

An alternative reading of the data relates to my positioning as a researcher. As I listened carefully, and repeatedly, to the recordings of the interviews, I became increasingly uneasy with my controlling presence in the group discussions. The

impulse to manage children's behaviour seemed to take over as a result of my having been a teacher for so many years. I cringed as our discussion was interspersed with comments such as:

"Are we concentrating?" (Anglerton, Focus Group 2)

"Are you being sensible?" (Shene, Focus Group 6)

"Now don't be silly" (Anglerton, Focus Group 3)

"I want you to come back round here. If you're going to move around you'll have to go back to the other room. Just sit here; it's not a long story, just sit here and be nice and quiet." (Shene, Focus Group 7)

"Who's is sitting nicely, ready to hear the next bit?" (Anglerton Focus Group 4)

Having unintentionally positioned myself as the teacher — the disciplinarian, the authority figure — the question has to be asked about the extent to which the children edited their comments into what they thought a teacher might want them to say. During my subsequent, systematic classroom observations of Pokémon he demonstrated that he was a compliant, diligent pupil who, when set a task to work on independently, focussed on his work, was seldom distracted and worked steadily until it was completed. Perhaps there was an element of wanting to please in his interaction with me? However, whatever influence my demeanour might have had, I suspect that it was a minor factor in comparison to the discursive power that operates in settings such as schools when "moments of transgression" occur, triggering "category maintenance work" (Davies, 2004). I use the concept of 'power' as it was defined by Foucault in *La Volonté De Savoir The History of Sexuality Volume 1*:

Power is not something that is acquired, seized, or shared, something that one holds on to or allows to slip away; power is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations (p. 94).

Power, for Foucault (1980, 1980a), is not something that we possess as individuals. Foucault's notion of power is that it is a relation or a process that operates in the social world. Power is circulating in all relationships and this is expressed through discourse. From this perspective I suspect that in a peer group discussion about what being a boy means, pleasing a relatively unknown adult who they position as learning to be a teacher, would not be as important as getting gender 'right' in the presence of the other children by constituting the self as discursively intelligible to them.

Davies (2004) argues that when individuals deviate from the customary gender order, children, in their quest for the well-known and the expected, let the miscreants know that they've gone awry and that this process can occur in response to fictional stories. There were instances in our discussion about *William's Doll* when comments were made about getting it wrong:

Ash: Only girls have dolls. He's funny how he's acting, and because he should be playing a boys' thing, a bit like tennis, but it's a girls' and boys' thing.

B12: It's actually quite funny, because he's a boy!

G.F.: What do you mean by that?

B12: Because it's really quite a girly thing.

G.F.: What is?

B12: Um, dolls.

Pokémon: They think he's a girl for playing with a doll.

(Anglerton, Focus Group 1)

My increasing disquiet at the intensity of these boys' reactions to fictional representations of moments of transgression, resulting in use of the term 'freak', was brought into sharp relief in this extract about *William's Doll*:

G.F.: One last question. If you could choose, if grandma was coming to visit you, and you could choose, what would you choose? What toy would you choose?

Amy: I would choose the doll, definitely the doll.
 G.F.: Because?
 Amy: Because girls like dolls, and with, if boys like dolls it would make them help, it would help them to, um, it would help them to recognize how to handle a baby.
 G.F.: Good. Spiderman, if grandma was coming to visit and she said you could choose a toy, what would you choose?
 Spiderman: Um, definitely the electric train.
 G.F.: Why?
 Spiderman: Because it could run over the doll.

(Shene, Focus Group 7)

The doll that had been so strongly identified as the feminine that even to play with it could make one into a girl had to be *abjected*.

G.F.: Why did his father get him a basketball when he really wanted a doll?
 Spiderman: Because he, um, because he thinks he was a girl.
 Sam: Because he thought that when he plays with dolls he's gonna be a girl.

(Shene, Focus Group 7)

Bronwyn Davies, drawing on the psychoanalytic work of Julia Kristeva, describes the practice of abjection as spitting out “the weak, the dependent, and the feminine —and with establishing the coherence and legitimacy of the dominant male ‘I’” (2004, p. 73). In constructing his own identity as masculine, Spiderman expels the doll by running over it with a train. The expulsion of the feminine is achieved in the violent act of crushing it beneath the wheels of a fictional locomotive. This is for him a moment of triumph, the exhilaration of the ego, when the taboo, the unthinkable has been violently ejected. Kristeva (1982) likens it to the loathing of an item of food and describes in detail the gagging, the retching, the bodily spasms and convulsions that accompany the vomiting. A part of the self has been expelled and in that same act an identity has been born. But Spiderman will have to continue the work of attaining his object of desire, dominant masculinity, by continually extricating

himself from its 'other', femininity, since the two are forever tied together given that masculinity is defined as the negation of its other (Butler, 1993, 1995).

Several times during our discussions the children made references to girlfriends or boyfriends. The following three separate exchanges are illustrative of the way in which discourses of heterosexuality work in the classroom lives of young children to produce 'normal' understandings of masculinity and femininity (Blaise, 2005; Renold, 2005). For example, through the typical stories that teachers read aloud, children gain access to and learn to re/produce powerful storylines that regulate gender and gender relations through the ubiquity of what Judith Butler terms the 'heterosexual matrix' (1990/2006). It is through this hegemonic matrix or "grid of cultural intelligibility" (p.208) that children learn what it means to be a 'real' boy or a 'real girl'. They learn that an important aspect of their subjectivities as boys and girls involves positioning themselves and others within dominant romantic heterosexual discourses.

- G. F.: Why do you think his father said "wouldn't you like a basketball?"
Batman: Because he thinks it's weird.
G. F.: Can you tell me a little bit more? What do you mean?
Batman: Well, his father thinks it's, it, it, um, it isn't, dolls aren't for boys, and they're only for his girlfriend.
(Shene, Focus Group 6)

- G. F.: Spiderman, what would you choose if you, if someone's going to buy you a present, what would you choose?
Spiderman: No, I'm talking about this one. Um, if he's got a girlfriend, and the baby had a baby, no the girlfriend had a baby and, um, she, he could give the doll to the baby.
(Shene, Focus Group 6)

- Ash: Girls like to have, um, be in fashion, like look really cool to be, to have a boyfriend.
(Anglerton, Focus group 3)

At first Batman seemed quite reluctant to participate in our discussion of *William's Doll* possibly because of its 'feminist' storyline which challenges the gender order and, in particular, the privileging of hegemonic masculinity. He may also have felt a need to distance himself from William's unconventional performance of gender. For instance, Batman was adamant that receiving the doll from his grandmother made William cry even though the text as I read it stated that "William loved it right away" (p. 28) and it is accompanied by illustrations of William lovingly cuddling and caressing the doll. Batman was unwilling to 'hear' the story of a boy and his love for a doll because it contradicted his existing understanding of what is intelligible behaviour for boys and girls which derives from the dominant gender discourses that govern his everyday life (Davies, 2003). His response to the dissonance prompted by the tale of William's non-normative gender performance is to re/create an alternative storyline consistent with the (hetero) romantic discourses (Renold, 2006) with which he is familiar. According to Batman 'real' boys might not have dolls to love but their girlfriends could. In what amounts to some very adept gendering in the form of category maintenance work, Batman expunges the doubt about what maleness means that was generated by William's deviation from normality, his unintelligibility, by citing the dominant heterosexual script and simultaneously re/positioning William and himself within it. His policing of William's abnormal behaviour illustrates the way in which gender and (hetero)sexuality are interdependent in the lives of young primary school children as they go about constructing their intelligible subjectivities and also how the power of hegemonic heterosexuality rests on the presence of transgressive acts (Youdell, 2005). Zolotow may have written *William's Doll* with the expressed intention of challenging dominant notions of masculinity but, for Batman, the reading of the story rather than calling into question established ideas served only to reinforce them. I chose to read her story in the focus groups thinking that it would open up a space for us to talk about gender, which it did, but what I failed to anticipate was

how easily subsequent discussions could be informed by the power of the heterosexist matrix.

If Batman seemed reluctant to engage with the reading and discussion of a 'feminist' picture book, Spiderman showed no such reticence. He seemed to enjoy not only the opportunity to share his knowledge but also the chance to perform within the group and to be assertive in doing so. For instance, at the point when I tried to move the discussion on he refused to answer my new question because he was not finished exploring a previous one. Although he too resisted the feminist storyline, his 'remedy' for William's transgressive behaviour was to also elaborate a possible alternative to a boy and a doll but to do so in a less dismissive fashion than Batman. Spiderman expressed his ideas, and in doing so contributed to the group consensus as they talked about being girls and/or boys, by citing dominant notions of heterosexuality. His talk of girlfriends and babies clearly contests the popular beliefs of childhood as a time of sexual innocence. Despite his youth and that of the picture book characters, Spiderman has no trouble re/creating a normalising discourse of heterosexuality where procreation is constituted as the natural consequence of male-female relationships. Interestingly the possibility that the baby, to whom the boyfriend, William, would be giving the doll, might be a boy does not occur to Spiderman but what his narrative does do is to position William as appropriately heterosexually masculine and to deal with the unintelligibility of William and the doll. The result of re/citing this discourse at school with peers and at home in family settings or other institutions, such as the church, is that gender becomes heterosexualised and, as noted by Renold (2006) "to be a 'real' boy or girl would involve desiring or growing up to desire the opposite sex, such is the power of the heterosexual imaginary" (p. 493).

Ash's comment about girls having to look really cool, to appear attractive, to get a boyfriend is another example of how children's talk regulates gender through the heterosexual matrix and more specifically how bodily expectations and desires are naturalized (Butler, 1990/2006). Ash positions girls within a discourse that maintains that girls need to clothe themselves in fashionable gear in order to appear attractive to boys. Blaise (2005) describes this aspect of embodied gender as 'wearing femininity' (p. 61) where girls perform different versions of femininity through the clothes that they choose to wear. She also describes this relational feature of gender as 'playing it straight' (p. 184). Children are very aware of the need to get gender 'right' and to be seen to be performing femininity or masculinity 'correctly' for others especially for their peers. The clothes that children choose to wear is one very tangible way in which gender is enacted and even when schools regulate children's dress, differentiation is customarily made between what is deemed appropriate for girls and for boys. However, Ash's comment moves beyond dress as merely distinguishing between boy and girl to seeing gender as relational. He is positioning girls and boys within a discourse that sees girls as objects of desire and having to perform their femininities in ways that boys will find attractive. By positioning girls as objects subjected to the heterosexualised male gaze, Ash is working at getting gender 'right' and in doing so he cites and naturalizes a discourse of dominant masculinities and subordinate femininities.

Connell and Messerschmidt discuss the use of the term 'emphasized femininity' in their 2005 paper *Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept*. They explain how the concept of hegemonic masculinity was initially devised in conjunction with a concept of hegemonic femininity which before too long was to be renamed emphasized femininity (p. 848). The change was in recognition of "the asymmetrical position of masculinities and femininities in a patriarchal gender order" and that "gender is always relational, and patterns of masculinity are socially defined in contradistinction from some model (whether real or imaginary) of femininity (2005,

p. 848). Blaise (2005) utilizes the notion of emphasized femininity defining it as the type of femininity involving “compliance with subordination and is oriented around accommodating the interests and desires of men (p. 21). Viewing Ash’s focus group comment from this perspective, while appreciating that it refers to boys’ dominance over girls, makes it possible to see how at the micro-level of children’s everyday classroom interactions this regulation of the gendered social order is a manifestation of wider societal inequalities between men and women.

If the reading of the story *William’s Doll* evoked strong emotional responses in some children, so too did the reading of Michelle Magorian picture book *Jump!* (I have to admit that subsequent examination of the interview transcripts at times provoked an equally strong response in me at the apparent tendency towards violence in the reactions of some of the boys). First published in 1994, it predates the film *Billy Elliott* but there are strong similarities in theme. The storyline of *Jump!* has Steven watching his sister’s ballet class each week and longing to join in. His startled mother refuses his request saying that “real boys don’t go to dance classes”. She suggests he takes up a tough game like basketball. Steven’s desires get the better of him and he joins his sister’s class uninvited. Recognizing his talent and enthusiasm, the dance teacher welcomes him and he becomes the surprise addition to their annual show although the dance sequence that he performs in is based around a game of basketball. When I asked the children what they thought about the story the expression ‘freak’ was again used by one boy in particular although not as a noun this time:

- G.F.: What do you think about that story?
Adam: Um, it’s more like a girls’ thing, because he’s got in a girls’ thing and a boy did it. It freaks me out!
(Laughter)
G.F.: What do you mean by ‘it freaks you out’?
Adam: Um, because he did ballet, it’s a girls’ thing.
G.F.: Is that...
Eva: Ballet doesn’t have to be a girls’ thing.

G.F.: Yeah?
 Eva: It's a girls' and boys' thing.
 G.F.: What were you saying?
 Eva: It doesn't have to be a girls' thing.
 G.F.: Yeah.
 Adam: I'm freaked out!
 (Laughter)
 G.F.: What did you think of it?
 Adam: Freaked out!

(Anglerton, Focus Group 4)

There is a performative aspect to Adam's comments that is not altogether captured in this brief transcript extract. After his initial comments about 'freaking out' our discussion had moved away from him and on to Eva but he kept interjecting and in effect continuing to recoil from what he had positioned as the bizarre spectre of a boy doing a girls' thing. His experience of being unsettled in this moment, his emotional response expressed both bodily and in speech circulated in the group prompting some to laughter. Sara Ahmed (2004) suggests "that it is the objects of emotion that circulate, rather than emotion as such" (p. 11). Steven, the gender deviant boy whose story has captured their attention and drawn them towards it, has to be turned away from either by positioning him as a figure of fun or by expressing disgust—by 'freaking out'. "It freaks me out", you have freaked me out, and you are a freak! Adam is engaging in border-work (Davies, 2006) in order to maintain his gender integrity. Having absorbed the storyline of the dancing boy, through attending to my reading of it and his participation in the group's construction of its meaning, Adam has come into contact with and taken in what he feels to be an object of disgust. This disgust causes him to recoil from the object, the presence of which threatens what is thinkable and tolerable, and not only to 'publicly' register his disgust but also to rid himself of it (Ahmed, 2004). Through this speech act Adam is simultaneously *abjecting* or spitting out the contaminant, the storyline and character of Steven, while restoring the integrity of his own gender. His 'I' has been cleansed by jettisoning 'girls' things', the borders between

masculinity and femininity have been restored and intelligible gender positions reinstated — one instance of an iterative process that will go on occurring whenever a threat to meaning looms as children engage in the hard work of separating “themselves out into the binary category to which they have been assigned” (Davies, 2006, p. 73).

The intensity of Adam’s emotional and physical reaction has resulted from the fact that, for him, the unthinkable has occurred. According to Adam, Steven has challenged the known gender order. This fictional disruption to the traditional pattern makes Steven a deviant. He may well be on dangerous ground and such a breach may evoke feelings of disgust or fear — the fear of the feminine, effeminacy or emasculation (Kehily, 2004) — in children such as Adam resulting in ‘category maintenance work’ or ‘border-work’. This involves deviant or gender-bending children, such as a boy who likes ballet, being made to see the error of their ways possibly by being teased, being brought back into line and more importantly, reinforcing the meaning of the two binary gender categories (Davies, 2004; Thorne, 2002). The fact that Adam’s response is not shared by all the children suggests that, in this setting, there may be competing discourse about appropriate behaviour for girls and boys. However, when I investigated further the children’s ideas about what were ‘girls’ things’ and ‘boys’ things’, more conventional ideas such as rugby, wrestling, soccer, building and fire trucks for boys and dancing for girls were reinforced. Even when it was established that girls could play games such as soccer, the boys worked to maintain the gender binary and establish a hierarchy (Kehily, 2004):

Adam:	I said that girls aren’t as good as boys at getting goals.
G.F.:	Oh, how come?
Adam:	Boys are different than girls, and girls are different than boys.
Pokémon:	Because boys are tougher
Adam:	Yeah, boys are tough

G.F.: What was that Pokémon?

Pokémon: And boys are tougher.

G.F.: What does that mean?

Pokémon: Um, it means they're much more stronger than girls.

(Anglerton, Focus Group 4)

I suggest that this is a good example of an attempt at what Amanda Keddie (2005) describes as “forms of dominant and dominating masculinities” being “overwhelmingly reinforced in groups” (p. 428). There is a touch of bravado here, almost a macho swagger, as Adam, aided and abetted by Pokémon, is using his knowledge about what it means to be a boy or a girl to actively reinforce dominant gender norms. They position themselves within a particular masculine discourse that emphasizes physicality and sporting prowess as markers of ‘real’ boys. Girls are positioned as not only different from boys but subordinate to them. For example, their performance on the sporting field is called into question, positioned as inferior to that of boys and explained by reference to a discourse of boys’ as innately possessing superior strength and hardiness. Although Adam and Pokémon do not talk about the particularly potent metaphor of scoring, their talk about getting a goal is used to position boys as heroic and powerful; a particular discourse acted upon in the form of sporting rituals. When I observed the children in the playground, for example, moments of sporting heroism, such as scoring a goal or taking a wicket, were celebrated by running down the pitch with arms outstretched or by forcefully punching the air. Their playground masculinity, an embodied masculinity that is all about physicality, athleticism and sporting competence, is being cited, celebrated and performed bodily and used here discursively in our discussion in an attempt to constitute a form of dominant masculine subjectivity.

Interestingly, Clare Bartholomaeus (2012) in her discussion of hegemonic masculinity and primary school boys suggests that since there are “limited differences between girls and boys bodies in childhood” (p. 232) claims that boys are

stronger and have bigger muscles than girls are negated. The accuracy of the claim is not the issue. What matters here is that the claim forms part of a relational discourse of differences between girls and boys, that is available to children in this setting, and that Adam and Pokémon are able to deploy jointly with some success to perpetuate a gender hierarchy. They cite a dominant discourse of masculinity as a more powerful way of being and its Other, femininity, is constructed in relation to it. Raewyn Connell (2002) describes this as an example of a gender regime as found in a particular organization and as reflecting a wider pattern or the 'gender order' of a society. She describes looking at the gender regime of an institution or of a whole society as looking at "a set of relationships – ways that people, groups, and organizations are connected and divided" (p. 54). Further, she maintains that these relations are continually being constituted in everyday life as they are in this example:

Pokémon: Um, it means they're much more stronger than girls.
 G.F.: And is that something that you need in soccer, you need to be stronger, do you?
 Pokémon: Yup.
 Adam: Yeah.
 Pokémon: And rugby.
 Lily: Oh well, I can run faster than Pokémon, I can run faster than Pokémon.
 Pokémon: No you can't.
 Lily: Yes I can.
 Pokémon: No you can't.
 Lily: I bet you in a race, you fell over.
 (Laughter)

(Anglerton, Focus Group 4)

However, the hierarchy is not fixed for while Adam and Pokémon then talked about rugby as a game requiring strength (a game played by Pokémon's brother and father) one of the girls, Lily, in a moment of resistance, claimed that she could run faster than Pokémon. He contested the claim but she insisted that she had once

beaten him in a race. By doing so she calls in to question the supposed 'naturalness' of the gender order that the boys are engaged in constructing. Lily had the last word and silenced the boys with a riposte that calls into question Pokémon's physical prowess: "I bet you in a race, you fell over." Her comment provoked laughter and established that while she may not be as strong or as tough, she could be faster and more agile and that male power was not impervious to challenge. The boys' final silence may also be read as a form of resistance indicating their unwillingness to engage any further in a conversation that positions girls as in any way more powerful than boys. What is also significant here is that 'doing' gender is an ongoing process with the children actively involved in struggling over available meanings about what constitutes being a boy and being a girl. Nothing is fixed. Subjectivities "are constituted and constituting on an *ongoing* basis" (Youdell, 2004, p. 484 original emphasis). In effect Lily is practicing what Butler's refers to as a 'politics of performative resignification' (1997).

Butler's engagement with the ideas of Foucault is evident in her 1993 notion of 'discursive performativity' where the "performative functions to produce that which it declares" (1993, 1997) and to be successful these performative acts have to be repeated. Adam and Pokémon, by describing boys as tougher than and much stronger than girls, are citing prior discursive practices, practices steeped in history and meaning, but there is the possibility of performative reinscription. In school settings multiple discourses are in play and children, such as Lily, can read, interpret and refuse inferior subject position discursively assigned to them. Although meanings have the appearance of being indisputable and, as they are oft-times repeated perhaps to give the impression of pre-existing subjects, they are not unequivocal and their effects are 'non-necessary' (Butler, 1997, p. 39). Statements made with the intention of denigrating others, and simultaneously legitimizing the self, as in Adam and Pokémon's instance of citing a discourse of embodied masculinity as strong and tough, can misfire. It is a statement that "runs the risk of

inaugurating a subject in speech who comes to use language to counter the offensive call” (Butler, 1997, p. 2). Doubtless Adam and Pokémon, relying on their peer group to support and legitimate their position (Keddie, 2004), did not expect such a disabling statement from Lily. Lily, not one to acquiesce or be demeaned, effectively disrupts the hegemonic discourse that attempts to position her and all girls as Other, as weak and soft, to the tough, bodily competent boys. She effectively practises a ‘politics of performative resignification’ (Butler, 1997).

But the debate continued when the children began commenting on the illustrations. Steven is depicted by Jan Ormerod, the illustrator of *Jump!* not just delighting in the dance but also wearing a bright pink T-shirt and pink socks which prompted Pokémon to remark:

- Pokémon: My dad’s got a pink T-shirt.
Adam: (laughs)
G. F.: Why are you laughing?
Adam: I’m not.
Lucas: It’s probably because Adam doesn’t want; Adam doesn’t like ` pink.
Liam: Pink’s not a boys’ colour, it’s a girls’ colour.
G. F.: When you said, um, and I mean that’s okay, you’re allowed, but I’m just wondering why? What is it about pink that, when Pokémon said that his dad’s got a pink shirt, and you laughed?
Adam: It’s because I don’t like pink.
G. F.: What’s that, you don’t like pink?
Adam: Yeah, I hate it.
G. F.: Why?
Adam: Because it’s a girl colour, sort of. Not much boys wear it.
Lucas: Yeah.
Lily: Sometimes girls don’t wear pink.
Olivia: Some girls hate pink.

(Anglerton Focus Group 4)

What I find interesting in this exchange is what is not being said by the children as well as how Adam, aided by Lucas and Liam expresses his ideas about being a boy by distancing himself from feminine ways of being. Desirable colours for boys remain unspoken but since pink is associated with girls, with being feminine, Adam's saying that he does not like pink, or that he hates it, positions him correctly as a boy. Although at other times in our discussion, when pressed, the children had little difficulty naming 'boy things', in this instance it was the undesirability of being associated with feminine ways that was made visible in their discursive practice rather than desirability of masculine ways. Davies (1993) notes the importance of analysis paying attention to "the absences and silences in children's talk as well as to the discourses and practices through which they articulate their experience" (p. 30). While aligning pink with being a girl, which was actually discussed on several occasions as a marker of femininity, here the children's social practices leave an equivalent marker of masculinity absent or unspoken. In a way the desirability of being masculine is also absent while what is foremost in this brief exchange is the undesirability of boys behaving in feminine ways by wearing pink. Despite this the fact that gender dichotomies are never finally resolved is clearly evident in the way that two of the girls contested that pink was a colour embraced by all girls.

However indistinct the meaning of masculinity remained, attempts were made, with varying degrees of success, to position it as different from and possibly superior to femininity. One such attempt involved accessing a very familiar storyline.

G. F.: I'm wondering what makes something a girls' thing or a boys' thing?

Ash: Girls like dancing probably a bit better than boys do, but not better than I do, but, um, but girls like to be in clothes, and they like to be in fashion.

G. F.: Does that mean that boys don't do that?

Ash: Yeah boys don't really like being in fashion that much, they just like to be cool, but girls like to have, um, be in fashion, like look really cool to be, to have a boyfriend.

G. F.: Okay. When you said boys like to be cool, what makes a boy cool?

Ash: Cool clothes and funky clothes, like ones that have words on it, and things like that, or like pictures like sharks.

(Anglerton, Focus Group 3)

(For as the bard once wrote:
Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy,
But not expressed in fancy; rich, not gaudy;
For the apparel oft proclaims the man;
Hamlet, Act 1, Scene 3)

If, according to Ash, clothes do make the man or in this case the boy cool, they do so for a different purpose. Being cool for a boy is an end in itself but for girls fashion is more important since it is a means to the romantic notion of having a boyfriend. The distinction that Ash makes here echoes Davies' (2003) observation that one of the damaging aspects of femininity includes "obsession with appearance" (p. xi). In the same way a little later, the bodily practice of make-up for girls (to attract a boyfriend) was referred to as a distinguishing feature of femininity. Although Ash is careful not to distance himself from dancing, for him cool boys need to wear clothing with potent symbols such as large, voracious sharks. These comments are framed by Butler's heterosexual matrix (1990/2006, p. 208). It is a heteronormative script that Ash draws on to position girls as needing to be attractively fashionable to boys. He is working out how to get gender 'right' through a discourse of compulsory heterosexuality that delimits bodies, desires and gender. Positioned as complementary to boys, girls are constituted as subordinate and passive to boys who are, therefore, also limited in whom they can become.

The normative nature of gender was apparent when one of the boys explained his evolving interpretation of what constituted 'girls' things' and 'boys' things'.

G. F.: Did you want to say something?

B12: Um, yeah, about the boys' thing, um, I just know about what boys do because, um, because sometimes, um, sometimes some boys go to Boys' High and there are no girls, and sometimes the girls go to Girls' High, and the girls, the girls learn stuff at, well, I actually know what they learn at Boys' High, they just learn how to play basketball and other stuff, and, and they learn about lots and lots of stuff that we don't know yet.

G.F.: Do they? Do the girls learn different things to the boys?

B12: Yep, yep. They learn cooking, and stuff, sometimes. But, um, they just get a recipe book and they try to cook, and whoever, and whoever cooks the bestest meal actually gets to go and work somewhere to make their food that they can only make sometimes.

(Anglerton Focus Group 3)

While grappling with his ideas about boys' things and girls' things, and very aware that there was a lot he did not know, it is significant that B12 draws on stereotypes to associate learning at Girls' High with the domestic skill of cooking and learning at Boys' High with sport that is still much valorized in Aotearoa New Zealand. Once again the discussion cites an aspect of the discourse Davies (2003) describes as the negative side of femininity — “fragility, timidity, obsession with appearance and with domesticity” (p. xi). At another point in the discussion the positioning of boys and sport and gender as relational emerged when I asked the children what they thought about Steven's mother saying he could not go to ballet but could play basketball instead.

Hugh: Um that would be fair because ballet don't do jumps all the time and you, you, you um wanna do jumps for a good reason, and, um basketball to get it over the people and get a score.

(Anglerton Focus Group 3)

B12 commented that he thought Steven should play basketball “because basketball is a boys' thing and, I've never heard of a girl playing basketball!”

Some Concluding Thoughts

It was noticeable that the discourses that the children drew on as they constructed, negotiated and performed their identities in the focus group settings were quite similar, and in many ways stereotypical, in each of the two schools. For example, the discursively constituted meanings of being a boy included the physicality and competitiveness associated with sport and games and dressing to look cool, while the meanings of being a girl included dancing, dressing fashionably to be attractive to boys and the nurturing domesticity of cooking and playing with dolls. While at both schools the embodied physicality of masculinity was apparent, taking the form of talk about boys being/acting tough especially in sports, only at Shene was there mention made of fighting. It may well have been a result of the course that the various conversations took but equally it could indicate a difference between the two schools in the way that some of the boys constructed their masculinities and achieved status within their peer group.

At Anglerton in Focus Group 4 Adam and Pokémon commented that “girls aren’t as good as boys at getting goals” explaining that “boys are tougher” and “they’re much more stronger than girls”. I suggest that maintaining this stance in this particular setting is part of the gendering process and works to position boys and girls in relationship to each other. Enacting toughness through sport establishes the boys’ status relative to girls (and probably to other non-sporting boys) and demonstrates their gender competence. It is a powerful individual and collective way of embodying their version of masculinity. However, at Shene in Focus Group 5 acting tough and hard was expressed by John and Nick through a readiness to fight. When I asked how they would “feel if someone called you a sissy” John said “I’d go round there and beat them up” and Nick quickly added “me too”. It has been argued that toughness and more ‘macho’ forms of behaviour are a reflection of working class mores although “not the ‘preserve’ of working class males” (Swain, 2004, p. 175). I

suggest that as a lower decile school, Shene boys are more likely to come from working class backgrounds and that the macho expression 'going round there to beat them up' could well be read as part of a class-based gendering process that is, for boys like John and Nick, the most powerful way they know of enacting gender. A problem arises when these comments and such behaviour are interpreted from a more humanist perspective or an essentialist view of gender which presumes that this type of masculine behaviour is fixed. In this restrictive understanding of gender such aggressive behaviour and language is seen somehow as natural and inevitable, 'boys will be boys', and is not only a very limited and limiting way of being but one over which boys have little or no control thus foreclosing on the possibility of change.

What my reading and analysis of the interplay of the children's individual and collective responses to the stories *Jump* and *William's Doll* using poststructuralist feminism and aspects of queer theory has allowed me to do is to make sense of the differing ways in which the children talked about gender in the focus group settings. It shows the children as active players in the gendering process as they constructed what it meant to them to be a boy or what it meant to be a girl. It illustrates how the children used the social contexts of the focus groups in the hard work that they engage in to re/create their understandings of gender. The ways in which the children positioned themselves and others within gender discourses served to reinforce gender norms making them appear 'natural' but it also presented some with opportunities to contest dominant ideas. What also became apparent was the ways in which power circulated through the children's talk and practices as some of the boys, in particular, placed a higher value on certain ways of being and positioned girls and gender-bending boys as inferior. The fluidity and at times ambiguity of the children's ideas about gender became apparent as these young children negotiated and struggled over certain meanings. Above all what this analysis highlights is that gender is dynamic. It is socially and politically constructed

relationally as children interact with each other in their social worlds; it is therefore context specific and certainly not fixed or stable.

A significant outcome from using a poststructural perspective in this analysis is that it illustrates well how there is not one version of masculinity but multiple masculinities coming into play as the children interact with the written text and each other to construct and negotiate their ideas about being boys and being girls . It highlights diversity and difference in how boys desire different ways of being and gain pleasure from enacting their subjectivities in a variety of ways. It shows the complexities involved when children actively locate themselves and are located by others within the myriad of discourses that become available in social settings such as schools. It emphasizes the weaknesses and limitations of debates about boys and schooling that refer to boys as though they form one amorphous, homogeneous group. This analysis shows how such taken-for-granted assumptions, that boys are essentially different from girls but within each gender all are basically the same, can be opened up for examination thereby revealing how such binaries are held in place. It opens up possibilities for generating alternative ways of being that are not as restrictive and limiting. Importantly, it poses a number of questions for us as teachers to ask about our beliefs and our practices. We need to reflect on whether we create safe environments for children to experience their differing ways of being, so that no groups are marginalized or oppressed. In view of the complexities involved in these social processes, we need to question whether in our practice, albeit unwittingly and perhaps in such simple ways as in the choice of stories we read to children, we perpetuate certain stereotypes of masculinity while marginalizing other ways of being.

But talking about gender, as is indicated in this chapter, is only part of the gendering process. Gender is not only constructed by children through their talk but also through their actions and interactions. Chapters 5 and 6, based on the Foucauldian

notion that the forms of self surveillance and discursive webs through which subjectivities are fashioned vary across time and place, document how gender is played out the classroom and playground as I continue to explore how the children use their understandings of gender to give meaning to and regulate their social worlds. Working from the understanding that gender is embodied the focus of these next two chapters is what this embodiment means for the lived experiences of the seven case study boys in particular.

Chapter 5

Schooling Gendered Bodies

...technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies, souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality (Foucault, 1988, p. 18).

Discipline and discourse then both position and 'produce' the subject, investing the subject with a desire for power, a will to know and a practised body that remembers and forgets, escapes and returns to, the practices that form it (Terry Threadgold, 1997, p. 25).

Introduction

A few years ago, when a former teacher of mine published a collection of short stories, I went along to the book launch, purchased a copy and asked her to sign it for me. She did so with a wry smile and a twinkle in her eye. I was intrigued and later found that she had written:

To Graeme
who sat at my feet
absorbing wisdom...
Love...¹⁷

Although this simple inscription conjures up an ancient, pastoral image of a teacher and her pupil, sitting on the mat for whole class instruction is still a very common experience for young children in schools today. In her critical discussions of bodies in schools, Carrie Paechter (2006, 2007) describes the practice more prosaically as an example of the ways in which children's bodies are closely controlled within school spaces as they are:

¹⁷ In actual fact when I was at school the seating arrangements were so rigid in many classes that we sat in alphabetical order according to our surnames, by which we were addressed, in single files of desks, girls on one side of the room and boys on the other, all facing the front where the teacher sat, often on a raised platform in front of the blackboard.

squashed together cross-legged, without fidgeting, on a carpeted area of the classroom. Children's bodies are thus brought together for group surveillance and control so that their minds can be communally improved (2007, p. 80).

In both of the classrooms where I carried out my research this gathering of bodies was a regular feature at the start of each of the literacy lessons that I observed and videotaped. Eager to please children were observed to sit promptly with their legs crossed and their arms folded tightly across their chests. Hoping to be noticed and to please their teachers, they sat bolt upright in this position thereby occupying very little lateral space. The teachers took the time to settle the class into a compact group by requiring stragglers to move closer and warding off possible problems by insisting that certain children sit closest to the teacher's chair. Sometimes children were obliged to sit in this way for over half an hour of whole class teaching; not an easy task for some but perhaps testament to the persistence of the Cartesian dualism in schools which Paechter (2006) describes as the sidelining of children's bodies in educational practices. In this chapter, in recognition of the fact that gender is constituted culturally and enacted physically, I pay particular attention to the children as embodied beings by exploring not only what happens to their bodies as they are governed by the rules, routines and rituals of the classroom but also how their bodies are implicated in the hard work that they do as they construct, negotiate and perform their masculinities and femininities. My analysis, rather than seeing the body as neutral and pre-discursive, focuses on how ways of being are embodied within the discursive, lived schooling experiences of these young school pupils. While focussing primarily on how gender gets enacted bodily I also consider how this may affect the responses to learning of the seven boys who were the focus of my observations and the simultaneous videotaping of them during their literacy learning. This involves consideration of the extent to which the boys were positioned and were able to position themselves as successful learners and pupils. Relevant

theory is interwoven in the analysis as a way of supporting it and elaborating on its significance.

I was particularly interested in how these seven boys would position themselves within the literacy learning environment since this is an area of the curriculum that is often stereotyped by young, primary school children as 'feminized' and 'girl-appropriate'. This is the conclusion reached by Elaine Millard (2003) as a result of her research into "gendered differences in the acquisition and uses of literacy at all stages of education" (p.1). She notes a tendency for boys to resist such activities as they continually "seek to define themselves as both 'not girls' and 'not feminine'" (2003, p. 23). How would the boys who, in positioning themselves as recognizably masculine, had not only distanced themselves from the feminine but forcefully cast out any vestiges of femininity in our focus group discussions, embody and enact their gendered identities? Would there be any early indicators of embodied laddishness¹⁸; the behaviour associated with schoolboy anti-learning cultures that has been reported in feminist research conducted particularly with older or adolescent boys (Jackson, 2010; Ferguson, 2012)? A disengagement from literacy and language subjects from an early age has been noted in competitive and macho boys who embody their masculinity through being the 'hardest', 'cheekiest to teachers' or 'anti-heroes in the classroom' (Skelton & Francis, 2003). Is accomplishing a schoolboy subjectivity that is recognizable in the literacy context compatible with the discursive constructions of masculinity and the available subject positions explored during the focus group discussions? What the analysis in this chapter will show is that each of the seven boys was able to find ways of regulating his behaviour so as to be intelligible (Youdell, 2006) as a literate schoolboy and that there appeared to be occasions where it was the classroom norms themselves that were modified to

¹⁸ Challenging the rules by "roaming around interrupting the work of others, calling out across the room, looking for distractions, throwing paper, swinging on their chairs and making random noises (Ferguson, 2012, p. 100).

accommodate the boys' restless, active, assertive and at times noncompliant masculine performativities.

The Literacy Learning Environment

The classroom activities during the literacy lessons at both Anglerton and Shene usually followed the series of four stages outlined by Graham Nuthall in his 2005 article "The Cultural Myths and Realities of Classroom Teaching and Learning: A Personal Journey". In it he describes what emerged from his series of studies from 1998-2001 as a growing understanding that lessons are made up of "an instruction phase, an activity phase, a reporting phase, and a wrap-up phase" (p. 918). Within each phase the conduct and expectations of both the pupils' and their teacher's behaviour is governed more by cultural traditions, rituals and routines rather than classroom practice that integrates the best available evidence of the processes of teaching and learning garnered from the educational research community. In his discussion, which draws on both cognitive science and social constructivist theories, necessitated by his aim described by Baljit Kaur as reflecting "the complex and multi-layered reality of classroom life" (2006, p 525), Nuthall supports his conclusion by referring to another of his articles entitled "Understanding How Classroom Experience Shapes Students' Minds" (2001). He makes a number of mentions of learning occurring in children's minds and how the purpose of his work was "to get closer to students' minds" (2005, p. 917) or "understanding students' participation in classroom activities and the consequent shaping of their minds through internalization" (p. 919). However, the analysis in this chapter, while making use of Nuthall's conclusions about the place of ritual and routine in schools, goes on to disrupt this binary thinking by using poststructuralist feminism to focus, in particular, on the use of ritual and routine in everyday classroom experiences in the shaping, controlling and re/producing of the gendered bodies of pupils. Before focussing in detail on the seven case study boys, this chapter sets the scene with an

overview of the literacy programmes at Shene and Anglerton and where the body fits in the Aotearoa New Zealand curriculum.

For the initial instructional phase of the literacy lessons all the children gathered closely together on the mat in the manner outlined above by Paechter (2007). At Anglerton strips of tape had been placed on the floor to define the boundaries of this space and a cross taped on the floor marked the spot that one of the boys was obliged to occupy. The activity phase in both classrooms took place with the children confined to individual desks and during this time when they were required to work quietly at their desks, the teachers taught guided reading lessons¹⁹ with small groups or individuals based on their reading abilities. At Anglerton the space to be occupied by the pupils' bodies in the course of these group lessons was carefully defined by the spreading of a cloth picnic-fashion on the floor with the participants then sitting around its perimeter. The reporting stage saw the children reassembling on the mat or sitting in a circle around the edge of this space. Often the time consuming process followed was to go around the circle inviting each of up to 28 children to speak about their just completed seatwork. The sessions were wrapped up with poems, stories or songs performed in unison with the children once again gathered closely together in the mat area.

The gendered ways in which the children's bodies were shaped and controlled by these classroom teaching routines and rituals soon became evident. At Anglerton, for example, whenever they gathered on the mat the same small group of girls sat in the front row nearest their teacher. Knowing how to behave like schoolgirls (Youdell, 2005; Walkerdine, 1990), they made audible gasps as they enthusiastically and nimbly arranged their bodies to be sitting as tall as they could, cross-legged with

¹⁹ The power of ritual is often evident in these lessons where 'round robin' reading, actively discouraged in successive Ministry handbooks, refuses to go away. "Round robin reading, where each student takes a turn at reading aloud, is never appropriate in guided reading. It prevents each student from processing the text and constructing meaning independently, distracts and bores other children, and obscures meaning" (Ministry of Education, 2003, p. 98).

their arms wrapped tightly across their chests. This was consistent with the observation that “girls sit in ways that minimize the space taken up by their bodies. Their postures cite and inscribe a discursively constituted heterosexual femininity in which the feminine body is small, tidy, restrained and deferential” (Youdell, 2005, p. 255). For the Anglerton girls being noticed for correct bodily practices, including being as closed and as confined as possible (Young, 1980), paid dividends in that their desire to ‘do’ gender correctly, in the way that was valued in this context, was acknowledged and rewarded by the teacher. Although I noticed that some of the boys also practiced this bodily restraint, and were in fact publically recognized by their teacher when they did, they appeared to do so in a less demonstrable fashion. Under the teacher’s watchful eye, orderliness in this setting was maintained in a number of different ways. At regular intervals during one lesson, the teacher would scan the room and announce that she was placing the name of a compliant, industrious child into a box from which she would later draw one who would then receive a ‘mystery present’. It was in this way that certain bodily practices became idealized while others were ignored or discouraged. When they first gathered on the mat the children were tantalized by the display of a small gift-wrapped object. Such tangible rewards, some would say bribes, constituted relatively short-term gains in comparison to the acquisition and workings of what Laura Hills (2010) refers to as ‘physical capital’.

Drawing on the conceptual tools of French social theorist, Pierre Bourdieu, and the body studies work of sociologist, Professor Chris Shilling, Hills explains that bodies within a given social field are accorded recognition and in turn can gain power and status when they develop in ways that are valued (p. 106). In the classrooms, where I was observing, very often it seemed to be the judgement of the teacher that predominantly determined what was of value in the ‘public world’ of the classroom (Nuthall, 2007, p. 84) and she, in turn, was positioned within a discursive web of school, community and societal values. Barbara Kamler (2001) draws on these same

notions in her exploration of the ways in which the commonplace rituals of schooling become normative in that they “structure in to children’s bodies and minds enduring ways of behaving and thinking as boys and girls in schools” (p. 68). However, Kamler also draws on Foucauldian concepts of discourse and power to describe this modelling process as ‘disciplinary work’ where the gaze of the overseer becomes internalized so that individuals learn to regulate their own bodies, thoughts and behaviour. In his later works Foucault identified this self-regulation as ‘technologies of the self’ (1988, p.16). Kamler argues that the curriculum of the initial period of schooling is focussed more on learning how to be well-behaved pupils within the culture of the classroom rather than acquiring traditional content knowledge (2001, p. 68). Her poststructural analysis pays particular attention to the ways ritualized songs, poems, routines and games are used to discipline both the collective and the individual student body.

Songs, games and the chanting of poems were regular features of both Anglerton and Shene’s literacy programmes. At Shene, for example, each observed session began with the whole class on the mat for a period of synchronized singing to a pre-recorded tape of alphabet/phonic songs and rhymes. Daily repetition of this ritual seemed reminiscent of rote memorization and what Kamler (2001) calls “collective regulation, an invitation to discontinue private conversation and move their mouths in unison” (p. 75). The teacher focussed the children’s attention with the instruction to “get your mouths ready”. Some of the children, especially the girls, bounced their bodies in time to the beat while still remaining seated in the same spot. Naming of children to receive rewards did not occur but the teacher did make use of her body to maintain order. At regular intervals she would hold up her hand firmly, sometimes directed at a particular child and sometimes at the class as a whole, her palm facing them in a sort of stop sign accompanied by the command “taihoa” (wait on or wait-a-bit). At times more emphasis was achieved when her whole body was used in making the hand gesture. Paul Connolly (2004) has suggested that where middle-

class children, such as those more likely to attend Anglerton, come to school used to having their lives for the most part controlled by adults, children from working-class families, such as those more likely to attend Shene, may experience the discipline and order of school as 'fish out of water' since "there is a fundamental mismatch between their experiences and lives at home and what is required of them at school" (p. 201). Certainly, Ms. R, the teacher at Shene, exercised a much firmer disciplinary style in regulating and shaping the children's bodies and a more repetitive and routine literacy programme than did Ms. G and Ms. B, the Anglerton teachers. There appeared to be more time spent at Shene on getting children to sit still, walk rather than run around and to line up quietly outside the classroom before moving into lessons perhaps supporting Connolly's 2004 proposition that middle-class children find it easier to submit to this bodily disciplinary regime or possibly that the teachers at Shene held the belief that their lower decile children required firmer control if they were to manage and maintain their bodies in socially acceptable ways (Shilling, 1992).

Shilling (1992) maintains that in the past the sociology of education has undervalued the significance of the corporeal in schooling practices. In a discussion of the production of physical capital and schooling he is critical of the hitherto disembodied attitude taken by sociologists by arguing that "schools can be seen as playing an important part in the construction of gendered orientations to the body and participating in the process whereby gendered identities are inscribed within the bodies of girls and boys" (1992, p. 13). One example he gives is how the tradition of school uniforms emphasizes the difference between the male and the female body and styles of clothing for girls can be an encumbrance to their moving and playing as freely as the boys. The wearing of the respective school uniforms was not mandatory at either Shene or Anglerton but it was during a lesson at Anglerton that began with the routine of the whole class reciting of a poem while they were all seated on the mat that a most interesting incident of gendering, dress, and the body occurred.

The poem *My Friend's House* formed the focus for the initial instructional phase of the lesson and inadvertently resulted in the children re/producing their understandings of gender, especially during the activity phase of the lesson, illustrating what Nuthall describes as “how teachers and students create their own routines and patterns of interaction within the larger culturally determined patterns of classroom behavior (sic)” (2005, p. 918).

My Friend's House
When I'm at my friend's house
There are lots of things to do
But sometimes my friend says to me
“I don't want to play with you”.
So I just find a toy I like
And have a little play
Soon my friend joins in, and says
“Let's see if you can stay!”

Although the use of pronouns in the poem does not indicate whether the friends are male or female, the accompanying illustration clearly identifies them as male. It shows two boys playing with building blocks and a remote controlled car. They are dressed, as are most of the boys in the class, in sneakers, long pants and long sleeve tee shirts and their hair is cut short. Because clothing, due to the ways in which it is culturally coded as masculine or feminine, is such an important visual marker of gender identity for young children (Martin, 2010; Paechter, 2007; Francis, 1998) recitation of the poem by the whole class positions them all as virtual boys —but not for long.

During the activity phase of the lesson the children were required to work at their desks on individual copies of the poem, to colour in the picture and paste it into an exercise book for future reading. I became intrigued as I watched and listened to the children's conversations as they went about their work. What interested me most was one of the girls working close to where I was sitting. She was covering her

worksheet with an exercise book while glancing around nervously before uncovering her sheet and adding to the drawing. When I watched her more closely I was fascinated to find that she was changing the appearance of the boys in the illustration by giving them long curly hair. I wanted to ask her about this but as she was working surreptitiously I moved on to observe more closely what was happening at the next group of tables.

There was no secrecy here as another of the girls was making similar alterations to the worksheet illustration. To my delight she held her work up for me to look at which meant that I could now invite her to interpret her work. I asked her to tell me about it and she proceeded to explain to me how she had added long hair and other visual gender cues such as feminine clothes to the boys to turn them into girls. When I asked why, she told me again what she had done. I reassured her that I understood what she had done but wondered why she had done it. She looked at me, *as though I was daft*, and said assertively “I’m a girl!” Unabashed at having asked such a seemingly obvious question, I pressed on by asking what they were playing with and she proudly said that it was a Barbie Car. When I asked what that was she said it was the car that Barbie drove and that it was pink and had flowers on it. I asked why that was and she replied that girls like pink. I gently challenged her by questioning if all girls liked pink. She hesitated and replied that most girls liked pink. Other children who had been listening to our conversation joined in. One of the girls said that she didn’t like pink. I pointed to her pink top with a sequined pink flower on it and she said that her mother had chosen it. One of the boys commented that he didn’t like pink, because it was a girls’ colour. Another boy, Pokémon, whose father currently played rugby for the Canterbury Crusaders and would go on to be an All Black, challenged him, rather hesitantly, by pointing out that his father had a pink shirt.

This episode, one of several where I heard the children discussing the significance of the colour pink, illustrates the ways in which the children engaged in a process of constituting their own and the subjectivities of others. They appeared to be engaged in a fluid process of working out what being a girl or a boy, being appropriately feminine or masculine, meant to them. Not being a boy, abjecting the Other (Butler, 1993), was clearly important to the girls who changed their illustrations from boys to girls. The act and product of drawing over the boys to re/present themselves as suitably feminine, "I'm a girl!" was, in effect for them and their audience, a bodily performative constituted through and constitutive of a discourse of femininity (Youdell, 2006). In this discourse, pink was spoken of as a desirable colour for girls. My questioning if this was indeed universal opened up a space for discussion. In seeking to position himself as appropriately masculine, one boy indicated his acceptance of this dominant discourse by rejecting the colour pink. However, another boy, Pokémon, troubled this notion, in effect suggesting an alternative to the dominant discourse, by holding up his father as a wearer of a pink shirt. Since his father was a rugby player of some note, which was also remarked upon by the children on a number of occasions, that positioned him unquestionably within the dominant discourse of masculinity (Ferguson, 2004), and Pokémon was thus able to call into question the 'correctness' of the dominant storyline about pink as a marker of femininity.

A moment of institutional surveillance occurred when the teacher walked around the room casting her eye over the children and their work as they sat at their desks. She looked over at the girls' reworking of the illustration and said "Oh you've done..." chuckled to herself and, as if giving tacit approval, moved on to the next group of children. By not challenging their subversive actions she seemed to be endorsing not only their citing of the discourse that gender, and especially femininity, is concerned with physical appearance but also the notion of the masculine/feminine dualism inherent in their work. The palimpsest created by the

girls is illustrative of Jacques Derrida's concept of hierarchical binary pairs (1967/1976) where one is defined against the absence of the other. Although one disavows the presence of the other it remains dependent on it in defining itself in terms of what it is not. The meaning of boy was still present in their work in spite of their superimposing the trappings of flowers, the colour pink and the quintessential femininity of Barbie which represented their interpretations of the meaning of being a girl. Interestingly, in their assertion of themselves as girls, by attempting to expunge the boys in the illustration, they evoke an emphasized or stereotypical version of femininity in citing the discourse of heterosexual female bodily ideals symbolized in Barbie dolls. In negotiating their gendered selves by resisting the dominant category and re/positioning themselves as suitably feminine, rather than disrupting the overall gender order, they appear to be entrapped by its subordinate Other.

Although my intervention had sparked a wider discussion about gender and the body, the children, particularly the girls, while participating in "the visible cultural context of the public teacher-managed activity routines and rules" had already simultaneously entered the "largely hidden but powerful cultural context of peer relationships and interactions" (Nuthall, 2005, p. 919). Where the teacher's intentions for the learners during the activity were focussed on their making meaning of the ideas or information they received through listening to, reading and viewing (Ministry of Education, 2007) an illustrated poem about being friends, favourite toys and dealing with conflict, at least some of the children were engaging in gender maintenance work. It looked as though, for them, outward and visible signs such as how the body is adorned, what it is clothed in and the hair-style are expressions of gender identity, as is playing with gender-appropriate toys, and there needed to be a public affirmation of proper allegiance or conformity to one of the two available categories. For example, a long-haired girl playing with a car, provided it was a

stereotypically gendered pink car with flowers on readily associated with the hyper-femininity of Barbie, was apparently engaging in appropriately gendered behaviour.

It is interesting to note that, in their subversion of the androcentric content of the worksheet illustration or perhaps their resistance (Raby, 2005, 2009) to the uncomfortable feeling of being assigned, albeit symbolically, to an identity category to which they do not belong, Butler's (1990) notions of performativity and the constitution of gendered subjectivities appear relevant in illuminating the girls' actions and our subsequent conversation. Davies (2006) makes links between Butler's theorizing and educational moments, such as the activity phase of the lesson described above, wherein subjects construct themselves through the dual processes of submission and mastery not just through language but also through repeated social acts. Taking up their subject positions appropriately as girls or boys and being recognised as such, having their mastery acknowledged, involves signalling what they are not, engaging "in signifying practices through which they abject the 'other', cast it from the self" (Davies, 2006, p. 433), while at the same time submitting to the power of prevailing discourses to define who they are and what they are. Butler describes it thus: "power imposes itself on us, and, weakened by its force, we come to internalize or accept its terms... Subjection consists precisely in this fundamental dependency on a discourse we never chose but that, paradoxically, initiates and sustains our agency" (1997, p.2). Davies sees it as the responsibility of teachers to scrutinize discursive practices as well as curriculum documents in order to be more aware of how teachers and students are involved in the processes of subjectification, of becoming gendered subjects.

The Body and New Zealand Curriculum Documents

One of the four foundation principles of Te Whāriki: He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa (Ministry of Education, 1996), the New Zealand early

childhood curriculum statement, is Kotahitanga. Defined as oneness or unity, Kotahitanga is said to indicate the holistic nature of children's learning and development. Accordingly, all the dimensions of development — "cognitive, social, cultural, physical, emotional and spiritual" (p. 41) — are woven into complex patterns that form the basis of all children's learning experiences. Mindful of the need for continuity and direction, The New Zealand Curriculum (2007), the "statement of official policy relating to teaching and learning" (p. 6) for pupils in years 1-13 (5 – 18 year olds) aims to build on and makes connections with the learning and experiences of early childhood. It also recommends that a responsive curriculum will acknowledge that pupils in the years 7-10 "are undergoing rapid physical development". However, it has been argued that despite this rhetoric of education of mind and body, the only times and spaces when bodies become visible in the official school curricula and the 'public world' of the schooling context generally (Nuthall, 2007) are in areas such as health and physical education. Increasingly, it would seem that the focus here appears to be based on a perception that bodily discipline has failed and the body has become discursively pathologised amid the wider societal concerns about obesity, diet, patterns of in/activity, drugs, smoking and binge drinking (Paechter, 2011; Cullen, 2010; Walkerdine, 2008; Jackson, 2006).

Carrie Paechter (2011), for example, maintains that, despite the apparent contradiction, schooled bodies are virtually invisible bodies because of the constant training and disciplining that goes into the managing, containing and controlling of bodily needs and desires as children are required to sit still, be quiet and always conduct themselves in a thoroughly disciplined manner in the "disembodied space of the being-educated mind" (p. 311). All of which is to ensure that bodies do not get in the way of the real purposes of schooling which are about the development of the mind. Very often school rules focus on what bodily acts are forbidden and less so on what is permitted. They detail further regulation of bodies by specifying styles of

dress or what uniforms must be worn which may also mean, for example, that if girls bodies are to be encumbered in skirts or dresses their ability to engage in physical activity may be compromised (Francis, 1998). The uniforms at both Shene and Anglerton included a dress option for girls.

According to Paechter (2011) this erasure or effacement of the body extends to a great deal of research into gender issues in education even though the body is central to children's knowledge of themselves as male or female: "researchers working in schools tell us very little about what the children they research look like; their bodies remain invisible to the reader" (p. 311). She encourages us to think about what then remains unsaid; why this might be concerning and what might be gained from focussing on the embodied components of schooling. The descriptive accounts that follow are my response to Paechter's (2011) call to begin by becoming aware of what there is to be seen especially the aspects of children's gendered bodies that are taken for granted in the "disciplinary context of the school" (p. 319). I seek to move beyond the pathologised approach to bodies. The focus is on the appearance of the bodies, how they occupy space, the manner of their movement through the classroom spaces, and how the children make use of their bodies in the accomplishment of tasks and as they relate to others. I draw on Iris Marion Young's (2005) discussion of feminine body comportment, motility and spatiality and, in particular, her argument, after Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "that it is the ordinary purposive orientation of the body as a whole toward things and its environment which initially defines the relation of a subject to its world" (p. 140).

In their investigation of the relationship between schooling and the development of the eating disorders anorexia nervosa, Emma Rich and John Evans (2009) describe the body as becoming "a 'voice' through which to convey a message" (p. 12). Elizabeth Grosz (1995) describes the body as speaking in ways that can be read by others as well as by the self.

Bodies speak without necessarily talking because they become coded with and as signs. They speak social codes. They become intextuated, narrativised; simultaneously, social codes, laws, norms and ideals become incarnated (p. 35).

My analysis here makes inferences about the boys' gendered subjectivities by listening for and making visible the complexity and fluidity of the corporeally spoken messages amid the silences that surround and permeate children's schooled bodies. I do so in the light of the position espoused by Merleau-Ponty (1962) that subjectivity is not an abstraction of the mind but is intimately bound up with the body. I am, however, very conscious of the limitations inherent in my analysis in that it is another adult view of children's bodies and in this respect fails to go that step further, as advocated by Paechter (2011), of including the children's own voices and their thoughts about their bodies more fully in the research process.

The Shene Boys

Batman (self-chosen pseudonym) is the tallest boy in the class. He is a Pākehā New Zealander with Dutch heritage. He has that long-limbed, stretched-out looking body which is characteristic of 7 year-olds. He has product in his fair hair to allow it to be swept up into the shape of a rooster's comb which seems to add to his tall, slim appearance. Perhaps this is an early attempt at what Emma Renold describes as 'doing masculinity' by "sporting the 'right' haircut" (2005, p. 81) in order to produce a body that is cool, stylish but definitely not gay and, therefore, unmistakably a boy's body. Although he does not wear a school uniform he is dressed in similar clothing to all the boys in his class. He wears black jeans and a black sweatshirt that has a smartly patterned black and white hood; a pattern that is repeated across the chest. His black trainers have two bold white stripes all of which gives the tidy appearance of a carefully colour co-ordinated set of clothes. Jennifer Craik (2005) has noted that increasingly everyday clothing is sports-associated. The sports connection can be seen in the boys' trainers and tracksuit tops. Perhaps this commonality in the boys'

clothing, as well as signalling peer group identity through what Craik refers to as a quasi-uniform (p. 130-131), also helps to enact a version of masculinity that valorises physicality and sporting prowess while at the same time denoting a body possessing the 'physical capital' (Shilling, 1991; 2010) that is valued in this setting.

He is seated cross-legged on the mat at the edge of the group when I begin my observations. As a year 3 pupil, and therefore one of the older boys in a class of year 1, 2 and 3 pupils, his is a 'knowing body'. He knows how to produce the right body. He knows the school boy script in this setting and his knowledge is embodied. He sits up straight with his arms folded across his chest and he is attentive to the teacher. If his arms are not folded, he clasps his hands together and rests his chin on them as he continues to sit cross-legged. At these moments there is almost an attitude of prayer in his demeanour. I am compelled to contemplate to whom, or to what, is this act of obedience directed. The obvious answer is to the authority figure; the teacher who is working hard to shape the children's bodies into the schoolgirls and schoolboys they are becoming in this institution. A less obvious possibility is that this is coupled with his respect for the subject position of the 'good pupil'; the set of embodied dispositions (Bourdieu, 1990) that constitute him as a disciplined, active member of their learning community.

Before too long, however, his struggle to sustain this posture becomes apparent. After 10 minutes he becomes restless. He begins by stretching and leaning back with his arms behind him. His legs remain crossed but he is almost lying down as he repeatedly stretches out his torso. He wriggles around to reposition himself at the back of the group. He plays with his spiky hair. He is now kneeling and he ignores the teacher's directive to the whole class to "sit right down on your bottoms" but he does join in a silent "Simon says" routine where the teacher touches various parts of the body and the children mirror her actions. None of his movements is checked by the teacher although other children are reprimanded for similar (mis)behaviour. One

girl in particular is not only repeatedly scolded for similar actions but is also required to move to be seated right next to the teacher presumably so she can keep an eye on her but also so that the teacher's bodily proximity will curb her transgressions. At one point her fidgeting hands are flicked by the teacher. For me, all of this raises the question of teachers having differing behavioural expectations of girls and boys or what Christine Skelton and Becky Francis (2009) note used to be referred to as the 'hidden curriculum'.

According to Skelton and Francis, an important finding of feminist research into how teacher attitudes may influence children's development at school has been that "many teachers assumed that boys would be more badly behaved than girls" (p. 95). Valerie Walkerdine's work is instructive here. In 1998 in *Counting Girls Out* she maintains that teachers' knowledge, understandings and beliefs about gender influence their views about learning potential so that the active, perhaps naughty and disruptive behaviour of boys is taken to be indicative not just of a 'real' boy but also the embodiment of a 'real' and intelligent learner; one who has the desirable characteristic of an active, inquiring mind. She even goes on to suggest that "it is as if there were one law for girls and another for boys" (p. 72) where, in contrast, "good girls are quiet, capable and helpful" (p. 75). In informal discussions with me the Shene classroom teacher certainly positioned boys as innately restless, rambunctious individuals but did so by reference to the notion of 'learning styles'. She described boys as 'kinaesthetic learners' who naturally possess high energy levels, have difficulty sitting still, learn best through hands-on activities and need movement to engage their brains. Although I did not systematically document the girls' bodily dispositions, as I viewed the videotapes I did notice that some of them seemed able to sit passively on the mat for quite lengthy periods of time.

This theory of learning styles seems to be a particularly pervasive discourse within education communities, including teacher educators, to the extent that it is often

taken as a common sense understanding of learners and learning. It all but becomes a Foucauldian 'regime of truth' despite there being no coherent research base to support its ideas. Ivan Snook, Emeritus Professor of Education at Massey University, warns teachers to be wary "of adopting any simple-minded view of learning styles as relevant in the classroom" (2007, p. 31). In a thorough review of research literature relating to learning styles he challenges all three of the main principles of the theory. He questions the assertions that there is a limited number of learning styles, that each of us can be positioned within one of these and that when our individual learning style is catered for we can learn best. After highlighting the severe limitations of the research he concludes that "all claims about learning styles are false" (p. 32). He laments the persistence of the theory describing it as "a modern educational myth" (p. 32) which echoes Nuthall's 2005 portrayal of teachers' behaviour as being governed largely by cultural myths but as Fyodor Dostoyevsky noted in his novel *Devils* "it is difficult to change gods" (1872/2005, p. 239).

Most concerning in this labelling of boys as predominantly 'kinaesthetic learners' is that it positions boys as an homogeneous group. Prominent researchers interrogating current concerns about boys' education, including Christine Skelton & Becky Francis (2003), Marcus B. Weaver-Hightower (2008) and Bob Lingard, Wayne Martino & Martin Mills (2009) stress the importance of disaggregating the categories of both girls and boys so as to understand better the educational experiences of all and, in particular, to begin to identify which boys and which girls may be disadvantaged within particular schooling contexts. In this way the dynamic influences of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexuality and dis/ability are not ignored or glossed over. Disaggregating opens up the possibility for identifying the origins and constructions of differences, and recognizing identities as "constellations, not homogenous blocks" (Youdell, 2006, p. 97). Youdell (2006) outlines how subjects and subjectivities are constituted by the coming together of numerous meanings, that she terms 'constellations', and that through the discursive

practices circulating within a particular context, such as a school, categories such as girl and boy are made meaningful. She sees the material body as central to this discursive formation of the subject (2006). Making use of the tools of poststructural theory and analysis in this way means that “the most mundane and taken for granted aspects of life inside school” (2006, p. 94) can be scrutinized to reveal their constitutive force.

Constituting boys as essentially ‘kinaesthetic learners’ cites and inscribes the populist discourse that maleness is a biological given, innate, and fixed and stable. It decontextualizes the processes of learning and fails to engage with the complexities of how, in particular contexts, subjects and subjectivities are constituted through linguistic and bodily practices. Discursively constituting boys as restless and needing movement in order to learn not only cites and inscribes discourses prevalent within school settings but also brings in to play discourse that are dominant in the wider Aotearoa New Zealand culture — that ‘real boys’ are active, energetic, physical and, importantly, sporty. Dominant discourses such as this come to delimit ways of being thereby defining what is possible, who one can be/come and give meaning to bodily dispositions. The persistence of such discursive constructions, as they intertwine and interconnect to produce that which is named (Butler, 1993), imbues them with a naturalness that belies their social construction so that what emerges is an ideal or a norm that has to be cited in everyday social interactions “in order to retain an embodied subjectivity that is intelligible and accessible” (Youdell, 2006, p. 46). In the case of the unproven theory of ‘learning styles’ and the labelling of boys as ‘kinaesthetic learners’ those norms are particularly constrained and constraining. The belief that boys are essentially different from girls combined with the notion of learning styles has seen the introduction of segregation in the form of single-sex classes within co-educational schools in order to create a ‘boy friendly’ learning environment. Rather than viewing all pupils as individuals with their own unique biographies and personal profiles of interests, needs and abilities, what emerges is

the simplistic pedagogic notion of matching teaching methods with learning styles. This may in fact mean denying or withholding certain learning experiences from some children in the mistaken belief that they are not appropriate to their style of learning. A study of one such boys-only class (Ferguson, 2012²⁰) revealed a classroom programme of short, structured lessons punctuated with “frequent bursts of physical activity in the form of games, sport and physical challenges” (p. 101). In subsequent focus group discussions the importance of taking part was emphasized by the boys to such an extent that they felt there was no alternative to participation. Deborah Britzman (2003) notes how powerful a discourse becomes when an institution, such as a school, endorses it in this way. Then within what Youdell describes as a routine aspect of school life (2006), a discourse is re/created which gives meaning to the category ‘boy’, normalizing embodied ways of being that must be cited by the boys in order to qualify as viable subjects. Reinforcing dominant regimes of masculinity and taken for granted assumptions about how boys learn and behave precludes opening up for discussion the constraining effects of and, for some, the impossibilities of hegemonic forms of masculinity let alone the possibility and/or desirability of exploring different understanding of what it means to be male and different ways of being/doing masculinity. As has been pointed out in research by Martino *et al.* (2004), for many boys, dominant constructions and practices of masculinity involve developing and sustaining negative attitudes to school and learning. Dubious pedagogical strategies such as learning styles and boys-only classes, which do not easily afford more sophisticated ways of understanding masculinities and femininities, rather than addressing the problems some boys are experiencing may well exacerbate them.

When Batman is required to move around the room he does so in quick, economical, purposeful movements and at times appears to scurry to and from his desk. Once at

²⁰ A brief reference is made to this study, which was conducted in 2004, on p. 3. It was conducted prior to the project on which this thesis is based.

his desk he promptly settles to the assigned task of reading his instructional reader which is “a traditional folktale retold as a reader for children” (McPherson, 1992). These movements and his posture at his desk are again indicative of his knowing body. He sits upright, faces the front and focuses intently on his reader. He works through it methodically, studying each picture closely and mouthing the words sotto voce as he reads them. He manages to sustain this degree of concentration for six minutes before engaging in a prolonged period of stretching and looking around to see what his neighbours are doing. He spends the next two minutes flicking through the book and then begins drawing while periodically glancing at one of the illustrations. Apparently dissatisfied with his work, he rocks back on his chair, screws up his work and throws it into the rubbish bin just as it is his turn to go and read with the teacher.

During this relatively short period at his desk, Batman’s demeanour seemed to be the embodiment of docility (Foucault, 1975/1980). He is not only able to comport his body in ways demanded by the setting of the classroom but there is evidence that his body has been schooled and inscribed in keeping with, for example, the posture guidelines considered appropriate when writing. He sits facing a table, his feet are on the floor, his body is upright and tilted slightly forward, and he holds the paper with the hand he does not use for writing by resting that forearm on it and the desk with his palm facing downwards. On another occasion I observe that there is something of the perfectionist about him when he becomes quite concerned to discover that he has misinterpreted the requirements of a set task. This is not surprising as he was out of the room when the full set of instructions were given but he spends time seeking reassurance from both his teacher and the teacher-aide that he can remedy the situation. Perhaps this accounts for the precision in his posture when writing and the malleable body he is striving to produce.

With his tousled, light brown almost blonde, curly hair framing his very rounded face and chubby, rosy cheeks, **Buzz** could very easily have been a model for a Botticelli or Caravaggio painting of Eros or Anteros! Also a Pākehā New Zealander, Buzz is a little younger than Batman and considerably more bodily demonstrative than him. It was Buzz who spontaneously took me by the hand and then nuzzled my hand as we walked along when I accompanied his class to their physical education classes in the school hall. It was he who took me unawares by enthusiastically hugging me on occasions when I arrived to observe in his class and again when I departed. Buzz, like Batman, wears the 'informal uniform' of a black, hooded sweatshirt with bold white stripes, dark coloured jeans and black trainers. He chooses to position himself right at the back of the group as they gather together on the mat for their daily reading instruction but somehow, especially at first, he seems less bodily conspicuous than Batman. Where Batman sits up tall and seems to want to be noticed by the teacher, Buzz's body looks to be hunched over as though he is avoiding drawing attention to himself. By repeatedly viewing the videotapes and rereading my observation notes I discern a pattern of behaviour that leads me to conclude that Buzz's body is becoming a very knowing body, knowing in a number of different ways. Buzz certainly knows how and when to get his body noticed and recognized by the teacher. When she pauses for effect after saying to the group that she is going to 'choose someone...' (for a reward) or when she issues an instruction somewhat sternly or looks around the group after asking a question, it is an upright body with crossed legs and folded arms, or with one arm raised that appears before her; a body that could well be saying "notice me, pick me, I am doing the right thing. I am a right-minded body". At other times it is a body following another agenda as trouser legs are rolled up and down and then long socks are also rolled up and down repetitively or it is a nearby swivel chair or an empty plastic container that is being played with. What becomes apparent is that the compliant body emerges when it is subjected to the direct surveillance of the teacher. This is confirmed when the children are assigned a reading, writing and drawing task to be completed at

their desks. Buzz moves off slowly to his desk, not unlike Shakespeare's "school-boy with his satchel and shining morning face, creeping like snail unwillingly to school". Out of the 30 minutes he is required to spend working independently at his desk while the teacher works some distance away with small groups or individuals, Buzz spends just two and a half minutes on the set task. During this time he is not openly disruptive rather he fritters away the time by gazing around, playing with an empty plastic container or simply standing at his desk watching others or apparently daydreaming.

In his teacher's desire to manage the children's bodies we see the classroom environment being structured through the normative discourses of the 'correct' pupil who displays 'correct' practices and demonstrate 'appropriate' demeanour. The classroom pedagogy here expects bodies to conform to the norms and time and energy is spent by the teacher asserting her authority by policing the norms and correcting deviant behaviour. Bodies such as Buzz's know when it is judicious to conform to the requirements of being seen as an intelligible pupil (Youdell, 2011) and when it is safe to disregard these strictures. While not openly challenging the restrictions, Buzz does surreptitiously resist them. In her discussion of different positions on resistance Rebecca Raby (2005) outlines a Foucauldian perspective on power by describing resistance as local struggles that disrupt processes of normalisation, rather than all out attacks. Buzz's intermittent compliance and quiet breaking of the rules could be read in this way. He manages to avoid his teacher's disapproval by ensuring that his lack of engagement with the norms, including being/becoming a productive body, remains 'under the radar'. His motivation remains a puzzle. I took his open expressions of his feelings, such as hugging me, as meaning that he was not seeking to position himself within some stoical, hegemonic version of masculinity that valorised toughness and unemotional self-control. He confirmed this to some extent during a focus group discussion when he seemed to be aligning himself with an alternative or non-hegemonic version of masculinity by

stating that “boys are allowed to have dolls”, that “I’ve already got one” although he did modify this by explaining that it was given to him “a long time ago when I was a baby”. This seemed to rule out the possibility that in the school space his becoming a schoolboy was in conflict with the demands of becoming a boy involving a nascent form of laddish behaviour including not valuing academic learning and resisting being regulated and controlled. I concluded that rather than looking for simple patterns such as non-hegemonic versions of masculinity and high levels of classroom obedience and diligence I needed to view each boy as embodying a unique pattern of responses. Accordingly, it is to Foucault’s (1975/1977) discussion of Bentham’s *Panopticon* that I turn to interpret Buzz’s gendered classroom disposition.

All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a school boy....They are like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible (1975/1977, p. 200).

Foucault describes the *Panopticon* in effect as the location of bodies in space involving arrangements of power in order to produce desired effects. In the classroom this means bodies that are immediately recognizable as schoolgirls and schoolboys. Within the rituals of the classroom, while under the continuous gaze of his teacher, Buzz can produce that recognizable body. In the perceived absence of her gaze the recognizable body begins to fade. Buzz has yet to inscribe “in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection” (1975/1977, p. 202-203). Perhaps in lower decile schools, where children are more likely to come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, taking on schools’ middle-class bodily disciplinary regimens is a more drawn out process for some? Maybe it takes time before:

he who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself (1975/1977, p. 202).

Spiderman, whose whānau identify as Māori, is a year younger than Batman and Buzz who are both Year 3 pupils while he is in Year 2. He is one of the smaller children in the class with black wavy hair, an impish smile and dark expressive eyes. For example, when he was hugged affectionately by the girl who sits beside him he rolled his eyes skyward, grinned cheekily and seemed to be enjoying the unprompted attention. On more than one occasion I noticed some mischievous byplay between these two. Once she sat in his chair when he went off to collect some crayons and the two chuckled quietly as he jostled her with his body off his seat and back on to her own. At first he appeared to have a quiet, shy classroom disposition and to avoid overtly drawing attention to himself. My initial impression soon changed as I observed him to move around his desk area playfully delighting others by impulsively striking what seemed at first to be kung fu poses that, on reflection, may well have owed more to the emphasized physicality of kapa haka especially with the rolling of his expressive eyes.

He wears the *de rigueur* sweatshirt top, dark blue jeans and trainers although his oversized shirt is red with a khaki stripe running down each sleeve. His baggy clothes seem to accentuate his small stature. When required to sit on the mat for whole class teaching I notice that he invariably sits at the front of the group slightly to the teacher's right. What this means is that when she turns to her left to face the easel which holds the charts and books that she uses for her teaching, he is out of her line of sight. At first I glimpse the attentive, disciplined, knowing body of the schoolboy that he is becoming in this setting with folded arms and crossed legs; a position he promptly assumes when the teacher glances in his direction or more pointedly fixes him with a direct stare. Otherwise he is almost constantly moving

although staying in the one position on the mat. He unties and reties his shoelaces, kneels up, leans back, squats on his haunches with his head in his hands, rocks from side to side with his head in his hands, plays with the nearby mobile chair or twirls the microphone around his neck like a hula hoop. He is simultaneously a part of the group and apart from the group as he seldom joins in with the co-operative reading of the enlarged text *The Hole in the King's Sock* or the accompanying discussion of word attack/phonic skills or the simple game of 'Simon Says'. When assigned a task to complete at his desk he wanders across the room almost in a lethargic manner. Once at his desk this reluctance dissipates somewhat as he works intermittently on the worksheet and surreptitiously skylarks with nearby children.

Spiderman's body is a knowing body in the way that Buzz's body is a knowing body. Visible to the supervisory eye of the teacher it can conform to the normative discourses of the proper pupil. It can be/come straight, upright and still. But Spiderman's body is also very adept at positioning itself to avoid being observed. At these times, within the confines of having to sit on the mat, it becomes restless to the point that it moves well outside the requirements of a properly deported body. However it is also a skilful body that can readily revert to being neat, tidy and disciplined when subjected once again to the teacher's gaze. When working at his desk and away from her direct field of vision there is a distinct physicality to his embodiment of gender, to the way he acts out what it means to be a boy by playfully emulating warrior haka poses. At these times his body cites and inscribes the discourses of powerful warriors with their manly attributes not only of physicality but also of aggression, rugged adventurousness and naked courage. There is also something of the clown in his bodily enactment of masculinity as he performs for his classmates. Further, the impish antics between him and the girl nextdoor, such as hugging and playful bumping of bodies, indicates bodies drawing not only on knowledge of gender but also (hetero)sexuality as they go about constructing their understandings of what it means to be a boy and a girl (Blaise, 2005). Butler's

(1990/2006) 'heterosexual matrix' is useful here in interpreting Spiderman's re/actions. Spiderman performs his version of being/becoming a 'real' boy, being intelligible as a boy, in his playful bodily contact with the girl nextdoor. His body also speaks its gender through the matrix with reference to the macho imagery of the warrior. Interestingly, it was the girl nextdoor who initiated the contact by hugging Spiderman and invading his desk which illustrates the point made by Emma Renold (2007) that "not only do girls become sex objects of a heterosexualized male gaze, but boys also feel the pressure of a "compulsory heterosexuality" and can also become subject to a heterosexualized female gaze" (p. 279).

During the focus group discussions Spiderman took pains to distance himself from the feminine. Fearing to be associated with femininity he stated that he did not want a doll "I don't want to be a freak... because I'm not a girl" and that the toy he would choose would be "definitely the electric train... because it could run over the doll". He constructed his masculinity in opposition to femininity. Having set up this binary it was to be shored up by the denigration, if not destruction of, 'girls' things'. According to Spiderman, a boy who owned a doll was abnormal. A boy with a doll was unintelligible as a 'proper' or 'normal' boy. Yet within the feminised sphere of literacy instruction (Alloway et al. 1997) certainly while under the watchful eye of his teacher but also from time to time when distanced from her gaze Spiderman's body was becoming intelligible as both a learner and a pupil. Meanwhile Batman, who subscribed to dominant discourses of masculinity and heterosexuality with the comments that "dolls aren't for boys" and "dolls are only for his girlfriend" comported his body in this context in ways that made it intelligible as pupil and learner. Buzz, who distanced himself from dominant discourses by being more accepting of boys with dolls, required direct surveillance by the teacher to remain within the bounds of intelligibility as pupil and learner. The pedagogy in place here at Shene incorporates that of "the normative discourses of proper students" (Youdell, 2011, p. 123). The movements and deportments of the children are closely

proscribed with not much leeway for non-normative bodies. This contrasts with the situation at Anglerton where both normative and non-normative bodies were recognizable as pupils and learners.

The Anglerton Boys

The children assemble on the mat area for the start of their literacy lesson. The lesson is to begin with the reading of the well-known folktale *The Three Little Pigs*. **Pokémon** positions himself in the front row. His arms are folded and his legs crossed. He is the only boy in this row. Behind him sits another boy. They are surrounded by nine girls. He responds bodily to the teacher's instruction "are you ready for school listening?" by placing one hand under his chin and looking intently in her direction. It is a pose not unlike Rodin's *The Thinker*. Pokémon, the studious schoolboy personified. Although he soon drops this pose, his focus on the story is maintained. When invited, he joins in the actions of huffing and puffing and the reciting of repetitive well known lines from the story, all the while remaining cross-legged with his hands neatly in his lap. At the conclusion of the story the teacher gives the children instructions for individual, independent work that is to be completed at their desks and she begins taking a series of guided reading lessons with small groups of children.

Pokémon promptly moves to his desk with short, quick steps, almost at a run. There is a jaunty air about this fresh-faced 7 year-old Pākehā New Zealander with his neatly cut dark brown hair, hazel eyes and compact frame. He wears fashionable, light blue denim, three-quarter length cargo pants and a khaki coloured sweatshirt top that has a matching light blue trim. As a rule shoes are not worn inside the classroom and he pads about in argyle-patterned, blue and brown socks. He wastes no time in settling down to the assigned letter writing task. He talks to himself as he goes about his work. "I've got my book". "I need a rubber." "I'm finished so I'm

going to ...” He seems to be managing himself by verbalizing in this way. He alternates this self-talk with staring into the middle distance, apparently deep in thought or seeking inspiration, for after each spell of staring there is a short burst of writing. He remains focussed on the set task in this way for 10 minutes only leaving his desk to ask politely if he can borrow a rubber. After announcing that he has finished he chooses one of the independent optional tasks and spends a further 10 minutes drawing and chatting quietly to his neighbours about Pokémon which are the subjects of their drawings.

What strikes me most about these observations is just how adept Pokémon is at performing or ‘doing’ his version of schoolboy during these classroom literacy lessons. Two possible explanations occur to me. The first is derived from Paul Connolly’s 2004 work *Boys and Schooling in the Early Years*. Drawing on insights garnered from social theorist Pierre Bourdieu, Connolly describes young middle class boys (such as those more likely to attend Anglerton) as ‘fish in water’ and contrasts this with the schooling habitus of young working class boys which he describes as ‘fish out of water’. His argument is that for some middle class boys there is a high degree of congruence between the control, regulation and emphasis on routines that they experience at home and the body regulation and disciplinary work of schooling. While not going as far as suggesting passivity on the part of the boys in accepting this discipline and control, he does claim that because of the power imbalances between the boys and both their parents and teachers the eventual result is that the “controls and routines have become internalised by these young middle class boys as a set of taken-for-granted habits and dispositions — in other words as their habitus” (p.135). In *The Logic of Practice* Bourdieu (1967/1990) describes this, in turn, as ‘em-bodied’ or manifesting itself in “a durable way of standing, speaking, walking and thereby of feeling and thinking” (p. 70). There appears to me to be quite strong parallels here between the process Connolly (2004) describes and the ‘internalization of the gaze’ Foucault outlines in his discussion of the Jeremy

Bentham's *Panopticon* (Foucault, 1980). According to Connolly (2004) the interdependence and correspondence of home and school whereby each reinforces and maintains the value systems of the other, including the valuing of education, together with the boys ready acceptance of routines and control, tends to be realised in "their capacity to engage in formal academic lessons" (p.138).

A second possible explanation or at least another contributing factor relates to comments made by Pokémon during the focus group interviews or our spontaneous discussions about what being a boy meant to him. He was prepared, albeit hesitantly, to challenge some of the more stereotypical comments made by his peers, for example that pink was exclusively a girls' colour. Could it be that by not holding too trenchantly to the dominant discourses of masculinity, as being all about physicality and activity, that his performance of, or his becoming a schoolboy in this particular context is less challenging for him?

Similar high levels of the ability to remain focussed on formal academic learning tasks and to readily acquiesce to the processes of shaping and controlling bodies into becoming intelligible schoolboys were evident when I observed **Spyro** although his was a more lively form of embodiment than that of Pokémon's. Spyro, a Pākehā New Zealander, is 12 months younger than the other boys in his class. Identified as 'gifted' by an educational psychologist, he periodically leaves his class to participate in the school's Gifted and Talented Education programme which personalizes learning for precocious pupils.

Today as I observe him he is working at his desk on an independent, individual alphabet drawing task. There are six other children working in this group. As well as being the youngest boy in the class he is the smallest. With his short brown hair, brown eyes, small features and triangular shaped face there is a puckish, animated air about him. Although at his desk, he prefers to stand as he works while his

neighbours are seated. He not only talks to himself as he works but also gestures excitedly seemingly engaging his whole body in his learning. "I'm 'j', I'm 'j', hard to believe" (his task is to draw an imaginative picture incorporating objects starting with the letter j). He appears to have literally embodied this learning since in his jaunty ditty he is taking the task on as if it were his own identity. He bounces up and down "J, j, j, jumping jackaroo. It's hard to think of 'j'". He holds his head in his hands as though flummoxed. Still cradling his head in his hands he rests it on his desk. He jumps up. "Jellyfish, a jellyfish eating jellybeans". He chuckles to himself. The girl next door asks if she can do a jellyfish too. He mimes 'no' by moving the top half of his body as though writing an 'n' and an 'o' in the air. He bounces up and down again. He puts his hands palm down on his desk and bounces up and down again. He kneels on his chair and begins to draw and as he does so he makes suggestions to other pupils. To the girl on his right he says "how about you draw hideous... a hideous hare with a hat on his head, a hot hare with whooping cough... just a suggestion". He says to the girl on his left "your cat could be eating chocolate". He continues to draw and as he does so he talks, apparently to no one in particular, about the structure of jellyfish. He leaves his work, after a full 20 minutes of concentrated effort, to take part in a small group lesson.

Spyro's body is a thinking body, an expressive body as well as a learning body. His creativity and the processes of reasoning and imagining are clearly manifested in his bodily comportment and movement. There is a physicality in his excitement about the learning process. His body comes into play as he communicates his ideas to others, thinks out loud and talks and manages himself through the learning task. Clearly, his body is no mere fleshy container that houses the mind, the seat of reason, the centre of all thought and the repository of all knowing (Grosz, 1995). Rather, there is an intermeshing of mind and body in his coming-into-being (Renée C. Hoogland, 2002), his making and performing of his school/boy subjectivities. There is also a sense in which Foucault's notion of a 'docile' body is germane.

Certainly the fashioning of the docile body in the early years of schooling is through processes of external surveillance and regulation but this, according to Foucault, eventually gives way to 'technologies of the self'. Interior processes of self-management, self-discipline, self-regulation and self-control begin to arise within the individual, albeit within the prevailing discursive regime, and begin taking over from the panoptic exterior forms of discipline. Spyro's was containing his bodily exuberance. All his fizz and excitement was directed to the task in hand (and those of his peers) perhaps arising from a combination of precocity, an innate thirst for knowing and what Connolly (2004) describes as the internalisation of middle class habitus with its regard for routine and control, educational success and a close alignment between these values and those espoused in typical schooling practices.

Connolly's (2004) claim about middle class boys and the "interdependent nature of the relationship between the home and the school" (p. 136) so that they adapt easily to school routines is evident in some but not in all of these boys. **B12** shows that while at times and in some classroom contexts he is able to conform to the required bodily regulation and constraint of becoming a schoolboy, at other times he seems to continually struggling with a restlessness that verges on unruliness or delinquency. I observe him while on the mat with the class, then while working at his desk on an independent activity and finally, taking part in a small group guided reading lesson.

B12, a fair-haired Pākehā New Zealander, is wearing the prescribed school uniform of a red, zipped, tunic fleece sweatshirt, black track pants and long black socks (although there is an official school uniform, very few of the children actually wear it and some wear only part of it). He scurries down to the mat very promptly, positions himself at the edge of the group and demonstrates his growing awareness of what is required of him as a schoolboy in this setting. He sits up eagerly with his back straight, his legs crossed and his arms folded. He listens attentively to his teacher, raises his hand to answer a question and follows directions such as

“whisper to the person next to you what you could draw”. However, B12’s learning of body competence seems to be incomplete. He soon starts to call out only to be shushed by the teacher. He rocks his body back and forth, gazes up at the ceiling, and withdraws one arm from the sleeve of his top and then plays with the loose sleeve. The whole class lesson ends and the children are sent to their desks.

B12 runs across the room towards his desk, pauses claps his hands and does a little dance then, when he reaches the first of the group tables, he sweeps his arms and the top of his body over the top surface of the tables until he reaches his desk. He stands up at it talking about something unrelated to his work and apparently to no one in particular since none of the other six children in his group responds. He sings as he walks around the group’s tables. Returning to his desk he kneels on his chair. He calls out three times “I’m doing a soccer field”. He rocks his chair and makes up a song “soc... soc... soccer field, how are you?” He hums and sings nonsense words “hoo...hoo...hoo, hoo, hoo. La...la...la...la, la”. He grunts “ah...ah...ah...ah”. He kneels up on his desk. He whistles. He sits on his chair looking around. He begins colouring his drawing. As he colours he repeatedly calls out to Spyro whose desk is some distance away “Spyro, Spyro, Spyro, Spyro do you think my soccer field’s good?” Spyro does not reply. He plays with a ruler. He kneels on his chair and whistles. He now stands and sings nonsense words again. He whistles. The girl next door draws a snake in his soccer field and he hisses like a snake. He begins whistling again. Out of the 20 minutes he is required to work at his desk, he spends approximately 2 minutes drawing before going to the teacher for a group reading lesson. Even within the more closely monitored context of a teacher-directed, small group lesson with only 5 boys, B12’s struggle to contain his body is plain.

The boys sit in a semi-circle in front of the teacher. B12 is at the end on the teacher’s right and slightly apart from the others. He sits with his legs crossed but only momentarily. He seems to be continually moving. He extends his legs in front of his

body while the other boys remain cross-legged. He plays with his socks, places his reading book on the floor, puts his feet on top of the book, partially pulls off his knee-length socks and ties them together! Noticing his fidgeting, his teacher redirects his attention back to the reading book by saying “are you remembering reading group manners B12?” He pulls his socks back on but now roll up the legs of his trousers and plays with a nearby plastic bowl. He pulls down his socks again and this time tucks them in to form short booties. At times B12 does listen to the teacher, joins in reading aloud and putting up his hand to answer a question but very quickly reverts to fiddling and wriggling around. In many ways B12’s seemingly relentless restlessness seems to be the embodiment and perhaps the genesis of what Molly Warrington, Michael Younger and Ros McLellan (2003) describe as laddishness in secondary school boys who “bring with them to school notions of masculinity which are frequently in direct conflict with the ethos of the school” (p. 145).

When I talked with B12 he spoke about the pleasure he got from physical activity such as running around and playing with a ball and all the different kinds of balls he had at home. Being active did seem to be important to him. Warrington et al. refer to Christine Skelton’s 2001 *Schooling the Boys: Masculinities and Primary Education* in which she describes the conflicts boys may encounter through being positioned within the competing discourses of being a ‘school pupil’ and its requirements to comply with classroom rules of contained behaviour and obedience and their need to establish and maintain identity as a boy within a discourse of physicality and activity. Perhaps B12’s constant movement could be read as a manifestation of such tension?

However, what needs to be considered carefully are the classroom consequences for B12 as a result of the way that he embodies his subjectivities. Deborah Youdell (2011) advances the argument that normative discourses in education typically reflect the mind/body binary that gives rise to a classroom pedagogy where “the control and

constraint of the volatile body is positioned as a prerequisite to recognition as student and to the process of learning” (2011, p. 125). She goes on to describe a classroom pedagogy where this binary is abandoned and describes how she observed a class of boys with ‘social, emotional and behavioural difficulties’ and the leeway given their bodies to recline, to move, to call out, to slouch, to be straight, unmoving or crooked and yet still be recognizable as learners (p. 124). There are strong parallels with my observations of B12. His body is not the controlled, carefully managed body expected by the ‘good’ pupil discourse circulating in his classroom. His body shifts and moves constantly but he still manages to take part in the reading lesson. He does just enough to comply especially when he is the subject of the teacher’s direct gaze. He does engage in recognizable reading behaviour by reading aloud, turning the pages, and calling out answers to questions. By doing so his is not an impossible body. Although in many ways a non-normative body, it knows enough and is capable, when the occasion demands, of impersonating if not wholeheartedly embracing the comportment of the body of the proper pupil. In becoming a schooled body B12 has found a space where he can enact his subjectivities and still be affirmed as a learner. Fortunately, his teacher appears to afford him some leeway as he negotiates the disparate requirements of being/becoming a ‘real’ boy and simultaneously being/becoming a conformist literate schoolboy.

Ash chose his pseudonym because of his fascination with the world of Pokémon. Since I knew absolutely nothing about Pokémon I was able to position myself as the learner and Ash as the expert who initiated me into this world. He explained that Ash was the main character in his favourite TV show and that the storyline follows his journey as a Pokémon trainer. He also brought Pokémon books and magazines to school so he could show me details of games and the cards he collected. Like the other boys in his class at Anglerton, Ash wears dark coloured fleecy track pants and a red sweatshirt although unlike theirs his has white raglan sleeves. He is a slightly

built 7 year-old with an engaging personality especially when he talks in an animated fashion about his favourite topic. As he talks rapidly he gestures expressively with his hands, often making quick flicking movements with his left hand. His jet black hair is cut very short accentuating his round face, high forehead, pale complexion and rosy cheeks. I cannot help but recall the sweet-tempered children depicted by Victorian children's book illustrator and author, Kate Greenaway.

I observe Ash during a whole class literacy lesson based on the *Story of Little Red Riding Hood* and later during a small group guided reading lesson. In between the two he is required to work independently at his desk writing a letter to the Big Bad Wolf expressing his feelings about him. Bodies are acknowledged as having feelings in this part of the lesson. Bodily affectivities form a part of a whole class discussion as the teacher and children jointly explore and express their feelings about the story by co-constructing a sample letter before they attempt their own individual letters. Ash remains very attentive during these various activities.

When the whole class lesson begins Ash is sitting cross-legged on the mat in the middle of the group. He is in the second row of children. Happily sitting closest to the teacher and subjecting themselves to her immediate gaze are seven children. Before the lesson begins an eighth child on the periphery is required to move to join them presumably so he can be the target of greater surveillance. Of the original seven children sitting obediently in the front row, oozing self-control, six are girls. Ash's is a body that also knows how to 'do' the 'good pupil'. As well as being cross-legged, he rests his hands in his lap, his back is straight and he faces the front. He often holds his left hand to his chin, sometimes noiselessly tapping his fingers on his lower lip. Often his left elbow rests on his knee and his hand is held in the air with the index finger extended just beside his cheek. Sometimes while it is in this position I see quick flicking movements of the hand but this is no recalcitrant body. This is a

body poised for action. This is regulation embodied. Disciplined school bodies know that to have a say, to make contributions to discussions, means raising your hand and being recognized. Ash's hand frequently shoots up signalling his desire to participate. On one occasion his keenness to make himself bodily conspicuous sees him stretching upwards with both hands in the air, pressed together above his head in a yoga-like manner silently but earnestly imploring the teacher to recognize him. Although, like all children, he occasionally fidgets and wriggles around, on the whole he embraces the classroom rules and routines. In many ways his is the epitome of the good student body. His is not only a body of ideas; it is a body eager to demonstrate its knowledge, to share its ideas and to participate in the co-construction of meanings and understandings. In short, it is a body that knows and adheres to the practices required of it to be known as a successful learner and pupil. Rebecca Raby (2005, 2009) would likely characterize it as a body where there is a fit between its bodily dispositions and the ideals, character and 'cultural capital' that typify the school setting.

Raby defines 'cultural capital' as a young person's "acquired tastes, deportment etc., which help or hinder in dealing with cultural institutions" (2005, p. 79). Drawing on the 2002 work of Jen Webb et al. she suggests that the sorts of routines and training children from middle-class families are familiar with assists them in negotiating classroom rules and regulations since, according to her, the hidden curriculum of institutions such as schools is based on conventional middle-class values, beliefs and attitudes. She also refers to the Foucauldian concept of 'governmentality' where bodies, such as the whole population of a school, are drawn into regulatory processes through the assemblage of a range of systems and strategies such as surveillance. She describes this regulation of bodies as a process of normalization based on middle-class expectations. Raby's reference to Foucault also calls to mind his related concepts of bio-power, the regulation of people to produce 'docile bodies', and the panoptic principle where individuals, under the impression of being

constantly scrutinized, exercise self-governance in the form of the self-control and self-discipline necessary to produce not only compliant behaviour but also compliant, recognizable bodies. Such bodies need to be consistent within the prevailing normative discourses and, in the case of schools, this means accepting and embodying the characteristics deemed appropriate for 'good' pupils. Raby describes bodies that are unsuccessful in these normalizing processes, or do not to comply with them, as being outsiders (p. 79) while Deborah Youdell describes them as "impossible bodies" or "bodies that are beyond the bounds of intelligibility" (2011, p. 123).

Children who attend higher decile schools such as Anglerton are more likely to come from homes where middle-class values are the norm. Because of this it is my contention that the apparent ease with which Ash is able to negotiate the classroom rules and routines, the bodily regulation required in this context, is because he embodies the cultural capital, "the values, skills and dispositions deemed valuable by the dominant (middle) class (Raby, 2009, p. 127) and normalized within the school's prevailing discourses. Each time he sits up straight and neat with his hand raised and his teacher calls upon him, or indeed each time her gaze settles on any other pupil with a similarly well regulated body, it is more than an invitation to contribute to the current classroom activity. Such recognition is a sign that the persons they are being/becoming, the particular sorts of subject positions they are enacting, are intelligible within the dominant school discourses of desirable school pupils. They are being recognized in this moment, and in each iteration of such moments, as intelligible persons within this social context (Youdell, 2006).

Interestingly, Ash does not always require such close scrutiny to remain within the bounds of intelligibility as a good pupil and can, on occasions, transgress classroom rules and not be censured by the teacher.

The small group guided reading lesson takes place on the mat with the children and the teacher seated in a circle. There are eight children in the group. Two girls sit immediately to the teacher's right and two to her left. The four boys sit in between the girls with Ash directly opposite her. At first he kneels and is reminded to sit right down and he quickly does so. The children are instructed to read silently passages of a junior journal story about milking time then they answer and discuss questions and generally share their ideas and related experiences. Ash plays a prominent part in the lesson. His knowing body is upright, alert and animated. His hand is frequently in the air. Although he remains seated, at times he raises his hand so energetically that his whole body as it strains forward seems to be active in signalling its willingness to contribute. But more often than not he does not wait to be called on by the teacher. He just blurts out his answers which she accepts. He makes 15 contributions during the 12 minute lesson and 11 of these are called out responses that are incorporated into flow of the lesson. Only once is he ignored, although not actually rebuked for calling out, when another pupil is called upon to respond to a question. Classroom rules usually forbid calling out and at times during this lesson the practice is observed but the rule does seem to be more relaxed in what is quite a lively discussion in this small group situation. However, it is Ash's enthusiasm for learning evident in his energetic bodily performance and his pertinent responses that ensure he remains within the bounds of an intelligible pupil despite his apparent rule breaking behaviour.

Ash's is a productive and compliant body when sent to work independently at his desk. Interestingly, his desk is the furthest away from the teacher's desk and from her teaching station when she works with groups on the mat. He sits at a double desk that is placed at right angles across the ends of the other desks in his group of eight children. The desk immediately on his right is not occupied. Positioned at a distance in this way he does seem somewhat isolated, almost on the periphery, where before in the small group lesson he was very much at the centre of things. At

times there is lively chat between him and the boy who sits immediately in front of him but he does not lose sight of the letter writing activity. He writes in concentrated bursts. His body sits straight on to the desk leaning slightly towards it. His feet are on the floor and his arms rest on the desk top. He focuses intently on the writing. He continues in these short bursts of concentrated effort until he has a piece of work to take with him to share with the rest of the class when they are called back to the mat at the end of session. Foucault's panoptic principle has come into play. Although he is not directly under the authoritative gaze of the teacher, since she is busy teaching a small group on the mat, he continues to act on his own body subjecting it, controlling its movements and gestures, to produce the desired, disciplined body of the 'good' pupil. His body also displays what Foucault describes as 'docility-utility' (1977, p. 137). The body of this 'good' pupil not only knows how to be industrious by creating the required piece of written work; it is also coming to know itself through compliance with the disciplinary practices of the school setting. In fact a range of embodied, gendered subjectivities is being discursively constituted at the same time as the children are learning to be/come readers and writers.

As well as observing Ash's small group guided reading lesson in the classroom I had it recorded on video so it was available for repeated viewings. As I watched the lesson unfolding a distinctive pattern of behaviour began to emerge that I was able to confirm by repeated viewings of the tape. I noted that because the two pairs of girls were sitting either side of the teacher, rather than being in her direct line of vision as she sat opposite the four boys, they were positioned more within her peripheral vision. Positioned in this way, literally on the periphery of the group, they were to be positioned figuratively on the periphery as the lesson unfolded. Nevertheless, the more times I watched the videotapes the more it became apparent that powerful lessons were being learned by all. There were 35 teacher-pupil interactions during the 12 minute lesson; 28 interactions were with the boys and only seven with the girls. With his total of 15 interactions Ash was the dominant

participant during the lesson. The boys called out their responses on 15 occasions. The girls did not call out. The teacher used mild reprimands on three occasions. In two instances it was boys who were reprimanded, boys who were subjected to the technology of power. For example, Ash mistakenly inverts his reader when he picks it up after gesturing with his hands. He turns it right side up but immediately inverts it again and places it on the mat in front of him. He continues to read with it upside down, pointing to the text with his forefinger and continuing to make contributions to the discussion. On noticing his odd reading behaviour the teacher says reproachfully "Hey, turn it round please" which he promptly does. There are eleven instances when boys are specifically called upon to answer questions but only five times when girls are. Praise is used by the teacher three times and each time the comment is "Good girl!" Touches of playful humour occur. The text reads "Milk for the calves, milk for the pigs, and milk for the family." Ash calls out "milk for ice-cream" at which the teacher laughs and adds "they might make it into ice-cream ... yummy!"

This short scenario is consistent with the findings of the body of classroom research showing that boys monopolize classroom space both physically and verbally (Francis, 2000, 2005; Sadker et al. 2009 Jackson et al. 2010) although here there are some interesting differences. As well as being bodily positioned centre stage, it is the boys' animated bodily presence that commands attention. This contrasts with the passivity of the girls' bodies, their shrunken, compliant postures and their expressionless faces; doing gender correctly by sitting quietly and tidily and sensibly following the classroom rules appears to work against them here. The bodies that receive the most recognition, that are hailed as intelligible as learners, are the active, vibrant, expansive, self-assured and somewhat impish boys' bodies. The lesson continues to move at quite a brisk pace. The boys' calling out is repeatedly accepted, making the teacher complicit in their rule breaking, and it is on to the next question or teaching point. In fact it is three of the four boys who 'out-voice' the rest and one

boy, Ash, who 'out-voices' everyone. But competing for and getting teacher time and attention here is not for messing about and 'non-learning' activities (Francis, 2000, p. 120), it is for enthusiastic engagement in what Nola Alloway and Pam Gilbert describe as "the feminised domain of literacy instruction" (1997, p. 50). Interestingly, although the main character in the story is a young man, Chris, who milks inactive cows named Katie and Mildred (the teacher reminds the children that earlier in the year there was a girl in their class named Katie), when the power goes off, it is old Mrs Long who saves the day by showing Chris how to milk the cows by hand. Perhaps the boys are initially drawn to a farming story with a dominant male figure who occupies an active, 'in charge' subject position or is there another classroom dynamic of power at work here?

As long ago as 1983 Valerie Walkerdine argued that in the discourse of child-centred approaches to learning, the ideal primary school pupil, especially in junior primary classes, was discursively constructed as enquiring, inventive and creative. Such a model pupil went about learning through a process of exploration and making discoveries in the way scientists do. The rhetoric held that this approach constituted best practice in terms of meeting the needs of individuals. The language today may have changed slightly but the contemporary philosophy of inquiry learning, with its emphasis on active protagonists who investigate, create and think critically, echoes this earlier discourse. Walkerdine (1983) argued that far from being non-gendered the qualities embodied by these 'individual learners' are those traditionally associated with masculinity. She contended that in effect these schooling practices, however subtle, amounted to 'masculinised primary schooling' (1983, p. 84). It would appear that more than 30 years later, amid claims that schools, especially primary schools, have become feminised and feminising environments and despite the belief that we are more aware of and better able to respond to gender issues in education, for this group of children not much has changed. The bodies coming to know themselves predominantly as active, assertive and a little mischievous

received more attention, by a ratio of 4:1. These were the bodies most often validated, if not valorized, as intelligible learners. In contrast the bodies coming to know themselves as obedient and quietly attentive, while not going unrecognized, remained to some extent on the margins. Obviously it is not possible to generalize from one snapshot of such a small group of children but what can be said with confidence is that within the pedagogy of this classroom lesson, far from being disadvantaged, this group of boys was repeatedly positioned and was able to successfully position themselves as legitimate pupils and learners. Far from being an alienating learning environment it was one in which these dominant boys appeared to be thriving. With power circulating in this manner it raises important questions about just whose interests and knowledges are coming to be seen as important and who is being marginalized if not disadvantaged. Which boys **and** which girls?

Some Concluding Thoughts

Focussing on the data in this way results from a discussion that took place during a supervision meeting when the implications of referring to learning as taking place in “the private world of the child’s own mind” (Nuthall, 2007, p. 84) were pointed out to me. It was noted that I was still embracing the Cartesian dualism of a thinking being and a separate corporeal being. Therefore, my starting point in this analysis is that the Cartesian dualistic person with a mind independent of and separate from the body does not exist and that since the mind is embodied, any exploration of the gendering processes, the processes through which one becomes a subject as played out in primary school classrooms, cannot ignore bodies as sites of experience and learning. Judith Butler (1997) draws upon Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* to elaborate on the significance of the body within the discursive matrix of institutions such as schools. Consistent with Foucault’s original exposition, Butler refers specifically to the prisoner’s body to describe the process of subjectivation, the making of subjects, although Foucault is clear that the disciplinary methods of

schools, armies, workplaces and hospitals are also implicated in the production of docile bodies—“a body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved” (Foucault, 1977, p. 136). Foucault also described his books as “little toolboxes” and invited his readers to make use of his ideas as tools to dissect systems of power which I take as justification for this extrapolation from prisoners to pupils.

All my books are, if you like, little tool boxes. If people want to open them, or to use this sentence or that idea as a screwdriver or spanner to short-circuit, discredit or smash systems of power, including eventually those from which my books have emerged. . .so much the better (1975, p. 115).

According to Butler, saying that a body is ‘formed’ by discourse is not as simple as it seems for forming, she says, should not be read as “causing or determining, still less is it a notion that bodies are somehow made of discourse pure and simple” (1997, p. 84). What she says happens is that the institution works on the pupil’s body in such a way that s/he is forced to try to emulate an ideal mode of behaviour (1997, p. 85). This model becomes the expected norm as, for example, in the powerful classroom discourses of the ‘good student’ and the literate student which more often than not include characteristics such as obedience, diligence and industry. Such is the power of this norm that it becomes a part of the individual’s psychic identity and in this way the power of the discourse is not only working on the body but is also working in the body, as though it had invaded the body, as individuals strive to fashion their identities through repeated bodily performances consistent with the classroom norms. Foucault describes this as power passing “over to the other side – to the side of its surface of application” so that “he who is subjected ... becomes the principle of his own subjection” (1977, p. 202-203). Power, in this sense, is productive but as researchers such as Christine Skelton (2001) have observed, pupils in classrooms

engage in the construction and negotiation of multiple, possibly conflicting discourses.

What is significant in my analysis is the divergence in the ways the boy's bodies know, become and perform their school/boy subjectivities within the discursive environment of the classroom. This divergence is not only apparent between the seven but also within the variety of ways that each comports himself. At times the movements and practices of each enact properly deported pupils. They are unobtrusive by being straight and neat. They are co-operative by complying with requirements to sit quietly or to move about, when need be, in a restrained manner. They are industrious bodies, or give the appearance of being productive, when required to carry out set tasks at their desks. In order to remain intelligible in terms of the normative discourses that constitute them as disciplined, schoolboy bodies they have learned to corral their movements to such an extent that when stillness evades them even their restlessness is controlled.

At other times they appear to disrupt the discursive normative ideals they have each been striving to approximate. In particular, B12's embodied subjectivity seems to push at the boundaries of what it means to remain an intelligible pupil in the schooling context (Youdell, 2011). Even when under the close scrutiny of his teacher, when part of a small group guided reading lesson, he is constantly moving but her censure of him is muted, "are you remembering reading group manners?" Although not comporting himself as a still, docile body, he nevertheless manages to constitute himself as a successful learner by following the lesson, reading the text and joining in with the discussion. By doing so he is carrying out, although somewhat intermittently, the fundamental role asked of him as a schoolboy. The pedagogy employed by his teacher appears to validate his way of being. His bodily demeanour is not overly controlled and constrained by her. Her reading of his body hails and

avows him firstly as a learner, despite his constant movement, thereby validating him also as learning to become a successful schoolboy.

The various practices or operations that the boys are performing on their bodies in this particular context to fashion them into not just schoolboys, but literate schoolboys take place within the feminised sphere of literacy instruction where discourses that may cause considerable conflict are likely to be very apparent. Learning to read and write entails being bodily regulated; sitting still, working with and responding to texts as well as using equipment such as pencil and paper in very specific ways. The classroom norms associated with literacy may be constituted in such a way that for many boys they conflict with their burgeoning understandings of themselves as masculine especially if part of their subjectivities is resistance to conforming, being regulated and controlled as has been noted in adolescent 'laddish behaviour'. Literacy learning may also prove problematic for some boys if they position it as a girl-appropriate activity and construct their own subjectivities as 'not girls' and 'not feminine' (Millard, 2003, p. 23). Yet within the bounded environment of classroom literacy each of the seven boys finds his own way of being/doing the 'proper' pupil and learner with some approximating the norms more successfully than others. Perhaps their relative immaturity accounts for their malleability and their fluidity in coming to know, to embody and to enact their multiple school/boy subjectivities. However, what did surprise was the way some of the boys were able to influence and circumvent classroom rules and routines to their advantage.

There are connotations of fixity or unvarying performances to classroom rules, routines and rituals especially those designed as 'disciplinary work' on children's bodies. Yet the bodily performativities of a group of boys in one lesson (Ash's group reading lesson) successfully undermined the enforcement of classroom norms by replicating a pattern of power relations identified by Karen Newton 25 years ago. Newton's 1988 research, reported in *Women and Education in Aotearoa* 2 in 1992,

documented how in her study of 'morning talks' in four junior school classes "boys engaged in 69 percent of all public teacher/pupil interactions" (p. 138). In one class of the oldest pupils the boys engaged in 82 percent of all teacher/pupil interactions, which is at the level of the 80 percent figure from my observation. She argues cogently that "boys' quantitative domination of student talk in classrooms appears not only to reproduce adult gender differences but also help to establish, and reflect, males' higher status" (p. 139). The 'morning talk' context of her study, which Newton describes a time for pupils to learn and rehearse interaction patterns that are "an 'ideal' preparation for the adult world" (p. 145), is a time when the children control what is talked about. In this way it is a time when children learn to attend to boys talking about what counts for them as reality and knowledge and the ways of knowing, experiences and viewpoints of girls get excluded. However, it was the teacher who was in control of the content of reading lesson context of my study but it could be argued that as the boys' ideas dominated in the teacher/pupil interactions, the children were still learning similar lessons about status, reality and knowledge. All of which would seem to indicate that the post-feminist discourse that we should now be celebrating girls' success as a sign that equality has been achieved and that feminist concerns in education are no longer relevant is at best unfounded or at the very least premature.

Chapter 6

The Gendered Playground: Playing the (Straight) Game

The importance of play in early childhood education has long been recognized with its virtues as an essential mode of learning often being extolled by references to renowned, pioneering educators such as Friedrich Fröbel, John Dewey, John Comenius and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. More recently, advocates describing play as 'developmentally appropriate practice' (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009) do so by quoting the ideas of developmental psychologists Jean Piaget, Urie Bronfenbrenner and Lev Vygotsky. However, these dominant pedagogical discourses that establish the centrality, perhaps even sanctity of play in early childhood growth and development, tend to identify its significance in terms of the opportunities it provides for language development, discovery learning, problem-solving, and general social/emotional, physical and cognitive growth. It is only relatively recently that arguments have been made that these somewhat romantic perceptions of children's play ignore or mask the role that gender plays in early childhood education (Blaise, 2005).

Rather than seeing play as a 'natural' activity and simply preparation for future development, teachers and researchers, such as Mindy Blaise, stress the importance of recognizing children as competent social actors who, through their play, work at re/constructing their social worlds; worlds that are ordered by gender norms. In order to begin to explore just how gender influences children's experiences she not only views the real-life work of play as one context in which children construct and shape gender but argues that without this understanding "the field of early childhood education fails to recognize how children's identities are constructed and reconstructed, and how their gendered, racialized, classed, and sexualised identities play a significant role in social justice" (Blaise, 2005, p.7). This chapter, by focussing on the children's playground experiences, explores how gender is constructed,

maintained and experienced by children in a school context of relatively reduced adult surveillance. It documents how children are positioned and position themselves within the playground peer communities and the relations of power that come into play as they collaborate in enacting and embodying their diverse masculine and feminine identities. By identifying the gendered playground discourses utilised by the children, the analysis focuses not just on the ways in which the children negotiate the discursively constructed social world of the playground but also explores the way these discourses open up and limit the children's possible ways of being boys and girls in this particular setting.

Unlike previous studies that have tended to characterise school playgrounds as sites where there is a high degree of separation between boys and girls (Connolly, 2003; Thorne, 1993), this pattern of segregation, while noticeably present in one of the schools, was more diffuse in the second where there were many examples of young boys and girls playing together happily without overt harassment by gender policing. Closer examination of these instances, however, revealed that within such amicable, co-operative activity subtle forms of cleavage or 'category maintenance work' (Davies, 2006, p. 72) did come into play to buttress traditional heterosexual gender categories. Although less obvious there was some evidence of play and playgrounds as dangerous spaces for some children which Glenda MacNaughton (1999) describes as resulting from children taking the risk of being seen to be different from the dominant gender norms. Ironically, I also observed instances of teasing or harassment when some boys, conforming to dominant masculine norms of aggression and mischievous behaviour, disrupted the games of others by invading their space, ostensibly as an unintended consequence of their own racing and chasing games.

The Anglerton Playground

Anglerton Primary School has an attractive and well-resourced school playground which is not uncommon in New Zealand primary schools especially among the higher decile schools. Its park like setting results from large mature trees, well maintained gardens and many different kinds of play structures and equipment. All this is enhanced by the adjacent five hectare Anglerton Park which accommodates the local tennis courts, cricket pavilion, large grassy playing fields and city council provided multi-play equipment which is utilised by the school during school hours. Given the attractiveness of the setting, it would be very easy, after but a fleeting look at the school pupils at play, to conjure up the romantic imagery of the Apollonian child (Holloway & Valentine, 2000; Jenks, 2005). According to Chris Jenks, children fêted by the Sun God Apollo are innocent, angelic, possess clarity of vision and innate goodness. It is the idyllic world of a Kate Greenaway illustration that is evoked (Ina Taylor, 1991) and, after Rousseau (1911), children are characterized as rational, self-disciplined and orderly. In reality playgrounds are social spaces, more akin to the messiness depicted in Pieter Bruegel's 1560 painting *Children's Games*, where gendered practices occur and where children, who appear to be engaged in seemingly spontaneous activity, are, among other things, working hard at constructing, negotiating and policing their own and the gendered, (hetero)sexual identities of others (Davies, 1989; Thorne, 1993; Connolly, 2003; Renold, 2005). The area of the school playground that the 5, 6 and 7 year old children from Ono (Room 6), and other children of a similar age, largely confined themselves to comprised an open grassy area, an adventure playground with climbing frames, slides etc., a sandpit and paved pathways closer to the buildings. The pathways had extensive colourful markings painted on them including hopscotch squares, a large snakes and ladders grid, and markings for ball games such as four square. The area was bounded by school buildings on three sides and an open-wire perimeter fence on the fourth.

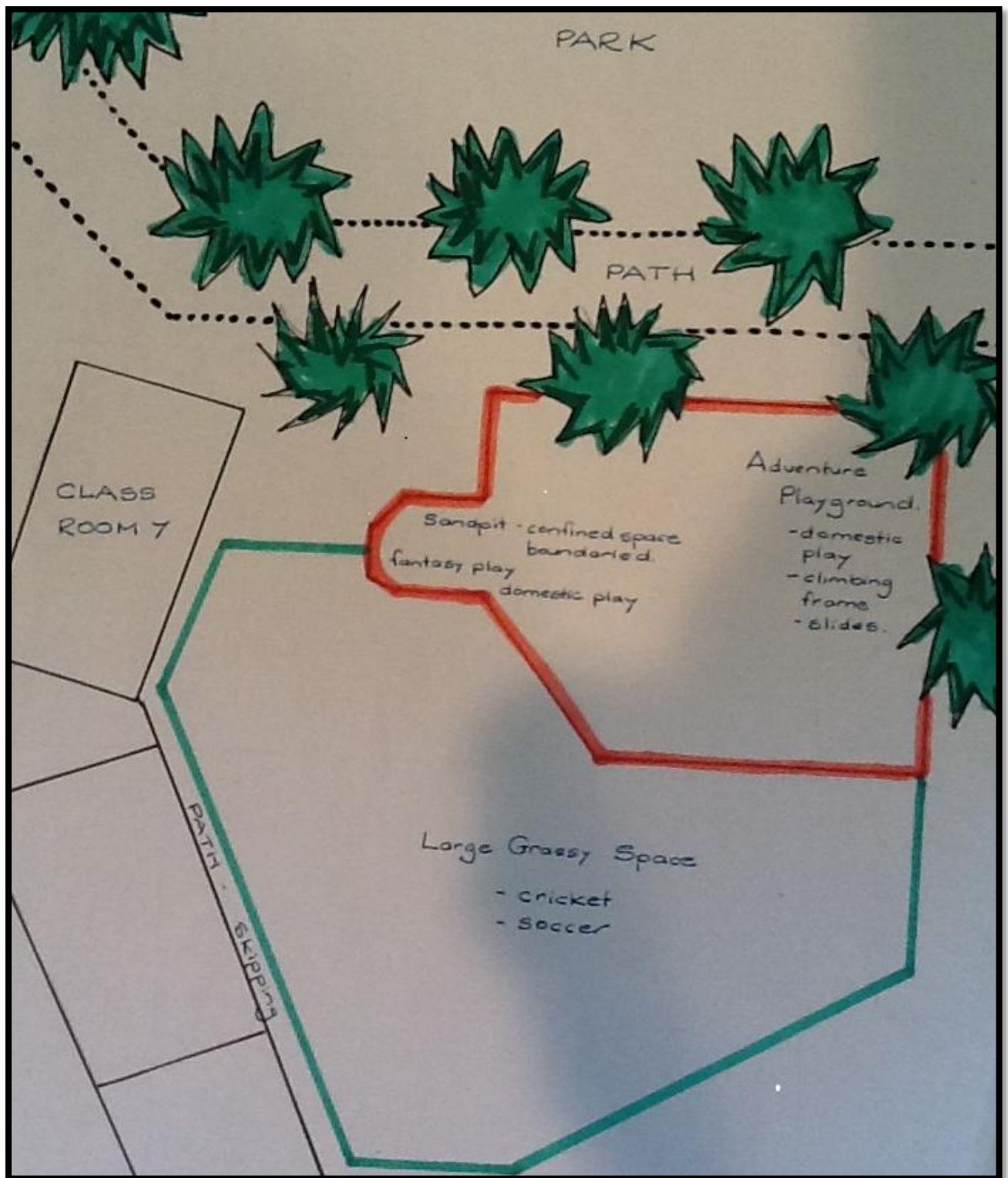


Figure 1: The Anglerton Playground

(Source: Observation Notes November 2006)

The openness of the grassy area seemed to be emphasized by the large protective sunshade sails over the other spaces which seemed to define them as more closed off spaces. In their 2001 ethnographic study of children's play in two London schools Epstein et al. indicate that the layout of playgrounds, as well as influencing the nature of the play children are able to engage in, is also structured by wider gender discourses and reflects gendered power relations (p. 158).

Although the games that were played in this area of the playground were numerous and diverse, the geography of the area did appear to have an influence with skipping confined to the paths close to the buildings, make-believe games taking place in the sandpit and the adventure playground and team games with bats and balls occurring in the larger grassy space. The composition of the groups playing these games reflected their gendered nature. Only boys played on the open grassy space, while mixed groups and single sex groups played in the sandpit and adventure playground. Skipping was a girl only activity. At no time did I see girls attempting to join in the boys' games of cricket, which was the only game that occurred during my playground observations, and in discussing their drawings of themselves playing either cricket or soccer the boys reported that no girls ever played with them. When I asked if girls could play cricket or soccer with them the answer, after some hesitation, was a tentative yes but they did not. In this particular aspect of the children's play there did appear to be a divide that was not crossed.

This group of boys, which regularly included boys such as Pokémon and Spyro who on occasions described boys as tough and sporty, were, in effect, monopolizing the most open area, the most visible area, and the most public area of the playground for their displays of physical prowess. This is in no way unique and it literally as well as figuratively confirms sport as central to the construction of masculinity for this particular subgroup of boys in this context. Taking up more space in this very public way which perhaps feeds into a sense of importance or entitlement could well be read as a rehearsal for future patterns of male dominance. The symbolism of some

boys controlling not just more space but the most prominent area of the playground where the younger children chose to play, with girls and other groups of boys confined to the margins seems to me to be very telling. Occupying territory in this way could be seen as a power dynamic at work; as commanding the most prominent space while at the same time marking themselves out as 'real' boys, as bearers of dominant masculinity. Perhaps this is the playground equivalent of what Karen Newton (1992) describes, in the context of classroom 'sharing-time', as patterns of interaction which mirror those in wider social structures. She argues that the ways girls and boys interact is simultaneously governed by and governs how women and men interact. She maintains that children "learn and rehearse interactive patterns which "ideally" prepare them for the adult world in which men dominate and control interactions" (p. 135). These interactive patterns are discursively constituted in the playground games and operate to normalize such gender relations in this particular context.



Figure 2: Playing cricket with my friends (Not to be reproduced without permission)

Also of interest is the way that in this drawing the cricketing boys are positioned as occupying space in a confident and proprietorial manner. The two batsmen boldly

stand astride the crease as they defend their wickets. Their bodies as a whole appear poised for action and ready to attack the next delivery. The wicket keeper is similarly alert and unflinching as he awaits the next ball. There is nothing tentative about these three action figures. Individually and collectively they position themselves in the playground as occupying centre stage.

The fact that there was no negotiation about who would occupy this prime playground position, that it just happened, almost seems to suggest that this was somehow seen as the natural order of things. Just as curious was the fact that I never saw the boys choosing teams for their games so did not witness any instances of blatant exclusion from the game. At the beginning of each break they simply took up positions and commenced play as though they were taking up where they had left off previously. In this way the space seemed to be a stage for them to habitually perform their “stylised masculine routines” (Swain, 2000, p. 107) while the games of others went on around them providing them with the backdrop for their displays. No scoring seemed to be taking place suggesting that what counted was taking part and performing. When I asked Pokémon why he liked playing cricket he referred to the different features of the game replying “Because it’s a lot of fun, because you can bowl, you can field, and you can bat” suggesting that his enjoyment was linked to the opportunities it provides for developing and performing a particular version of masculinity—‘sporty masculinity’ which involves competence in a variety of physical skills.

Other rituals were performed suggesting elements of fantasy play and that they were emulating and embodying the accomplishments and behaviour of their heroes who were professional cricketers. For instance, the celebratory behaviour of forcefully punching the air and running down the pitch with arms outstretched occurred when a wicket was taken but they stopped short of the choreographed, contentious ‘end zone’ celebrations of jumping into one another’s arms and kissing

each other like professional soccer players; a practice that would be deplored by those aspiring to be good kiwi blokes? Possibly Judith Butler's 1990 borrowing of Adrienne Rich's 1980 notion of the 'compulsory practice of heterosexuality' could also be coming into play here. The predominant images of New Zealand's professional sporting heroes presented by the media are invariably of 'hard' masculinities; real men who are physically tough, athletic, powerful, and therefore the epitome of kiwi blokes. It is taken for granted that such men are heterosexual so celebratory kissing or cuddling would be seen as effeminate or deviant and therefore to be avoided. Although there was no obvious gallery to witness the ritual displays by the cricketing boys, except for the other participants, in mimicking their sporting heroes and, in effect, practicing to become (heterosexual) men just like them, it appeared that appropriate opportunities to celebrate their own budding physicality and sporting prowess were not to be missed.

Game playing, be it cricket or soccer, seemed to provide these boys with the opportunity, on an ongoing basis, to overtly display and rehearse embodied masculine qualities of physicality, fitness, skill and strength and so illustrate that:

the action of gender requires a performance that is *repeated*. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation. Although there are individual bodies that enact these significations by becoming stylized into gendered modes, this "action" is a public action (Butler, 1990, p. 140).

The language of sport is redolent with imagery of war and conflict with talk of dominating the opposition, defending or invading territory, going on the attack and drawing first blood. In the case of cricket defending one's wicket is crucial especially when facing an attacking bowler. With connotations such as these perhaps the boys' real and imaginary efforts to replicate the actions of their heroes, their practising to

become men (Swain, 2000, p. 101), contributes to identity discourses of themselves as defenders, protectors and winners. Certainly, nuances such as these were apparent in a number of different ways in the fantasy play that the boys talked about and depicted in their drawings.

Sport was not the only marker of dominant masculinity at Anglerton, although it was certainly a most important component. Fantasy play in the form of superheroes was utilised by some boys as an expression of embodied physicality and/or athleticism. Intriguingly, Ellen Jordan (1995) contends that, as boys grow older, the superhero games in the fantasy play of many young boys that arise from the warrior discourse come to be replaced by lunch-time cricket and soccer with the sporting champion as the new hero to be emulated. At Anglerton the boys I observed playing cricket also reported their superhero play to me when discussing their drawings of their playground games. Unlike the stylised games of cricket, I was aware, in the general *mêlée* of a busy school playground, of more frenetic activity in other parts of the playground although not privy to its meaning until one boy revealed that:

we play 'don't touch it', and we pretend that we're surrounded by crocodiles and dinosaurs, and we fight them, and we zoom all around the playground.

Another boy talked of acting out games of adventure involving “creatures, like, really scary, and really fierce” (he then made scary noises).



Figure 3: Acting out the creatures. (Not to be reproduced without permission)

He identified these creatures as coming from his computer, X-box, PlayStation 1 and PlayStation 2 and *Lord of the Rings* games. Once again this gave these boys the opportunity to practice and acquire bodily qualities, reflecting those of their masculine fantasy figures, such as speed, strength, action and movement in their negotiation and construction of what, for them, were appropriate ways of 'doing boy' in this context. In 2005 in *The Body in Culture, Technology & Society*, Chris Shilling outlines the notion of 'physical capital', akin to Pierre Bourdieu's concept of 'cultural capital', arguing that in varying social circumstances the body becomes a bearer of cultural meanings and that individuals work to attain "bodily appearances, competencies and performances that raise their stock within those social fields" (p. 63). Clearly, for these Anglerton boys, corporeal qualities of vigour and physicality were important in the re/production of their masculine playground identities and their fantasy playground games were capitalized on as opportunities to acquire and display such competencies. One of the boys captured this particular construction of masculinity very effectively in his drawing. He described to me how he had drawn

his two friends: “they’ve got their arms out pretending they’ve got super muscles, and I’m going around running because Totodile²¹ runs really fast”.



Figure 4: Totodile and Machop (Not to be reproduced without permission)

The figures are depicted in a lively manner. There is movement and energy in the picture as one figure runs waving his arms while the other flexes not two, but four arms and not one, but two biceps per arm — eight muscles in all, super muscles indeed. They display real delight in their strength and energy with ear to ear grins on their animated faces. Interestingly, this picture contrasts quite markedly with the way some of the girls portray themselves. Although drawn boldly, their images are more static, as though being is more important than doing. Two of the figures (See Figure 5), drawn standing within the confines of the sandpit, are shown in profile

²¹ Totodile (Pokémon – Pocket Monsters) is a baby crocodilian whose name is a combination of tot and crocodile. Totodile is powerful with strong jaws, sharp teeth and a painful bite. Although described as playful, Totodile has a tough side and reacts quickly in a battle. Machop punches extremely fast, throwing five hundred punches a second. With only one hand, it can move a mountain. Because of its four arms, it can hit from a multitude of angles and pin all of its foes limbs at once. (From Bulbapedia, the community-driven Pokémon encyclopedia <http://bulbapedia.bulbagarden.net>).

suggesting an intimate, interpersonal quality to their relationship which contrasts with the running and flexing boys who face outwards in a more dynamic manner seemingly ready, willing and able to take on the world as only superheroes can.



Figure 5: Playing in the sandpit (Not to be reproduced without permission)

The two girls depicted playing in the sandpit are slim figures with definite markers of femininity. Both have long hair, one with a very long dark wavy mane of hair while the other's is much shorter and fair. Their clothing is neat and trim consisting of tops and long pants. One top is a sleeveless smock while the other is a long-sleeved fashionable purple T-shirt. One pair of pants is denim blue and the other has natty stripes. One of the girls is barefooted suggesting that her version of femininity does not restrict her from taking part in a range of activities including messy ones. No need to worry about swinging or hanging upside down on the jungle gym in these clothes. This was confirmed when I asked them about other games they play and the reply was that "we play a little bit of tag and we do cartwheels and

handstands and headstands". For me, however, the most striking feature of this drawing is the air of tranquillity that pervades it. Words like passivity and compliance spring to mind but I think they are misplaced. These are very self-assured characters who occupy space in a poised and quietly confident manner. However, it is a confined space as opposed to the open space dominated by the boys playing cricket. The girls' apparently harmonious play is described more fully when they told me about their drawing.

- G.F.: D. would you like to tell me about the games you like to play?
D.: Well I play in the sandpit with C. and I am the puppy and she is the owner and we collect that dark sand and we play with it, and sometimes I get into lots of mischief in the games and she calls me mischief.

It has been argued that when young children embody animals in their play narratives they assume roles that match with their gendered identities (Madrid & Kantor, 2009). They describe this as amounting to a form of 'category maintenance' work or 'borderwork' with boys embodying 'wild and aggressive animals' or hero roles of saving or rescuing passive females. That did not appear to be the case here for D. was acting as a mischievous puppy neither a passive or compliant role. It could be argued though that the owner embodied a more caring, nurturing or controlling role. Rather than reinforcing dominant discursive masculine or feminine subjectivities these two girls appeared to be experimenting with different subject positions in their sandpit play perhaps showing the fluidity of gender in young children.

The fantasy play of others differed markedly from the superhero play of the boys and for this reason is sometimes referred to in the literature as role play rather than fantasy play (Corsaro, 2005). I observed three children, two boys and a girl, who

regularly played together either in the more confining space of the sandpit, the intermediate space of the adventure playground or in games of chasing around the school buildings. There was a more domestic quality to some of their games. Through talking about their drawings and their captions they unravelled for me the meanings in the imaginative games they liked to play. They were actually variations on the theme of 'playing house' or 'mummies and daddies'. Drawing caption:

Joonyer Becky²², Toby and Kevin are playing in the avencher playground We are playing pupys Toby is the Dad Becky is the Mum and Kevin is the pupy Sometimes we play Kings and Queens and Tobys the King and Beckys the Queen and Kevins the pupy.



Figure 6: Playing in the adventure playground (Not to be reproduced without permission)

What I find particularly interesting about this type of play is its usefulness in revealing not just how the children understand gender relations but also “the ways in which children’s normative gender identities as ‘girls’ and ‘boys’ are inextricably tied to dominant notions of heterosexuality” (Renold, 2005, p. 7). Renold acknowledges Butler’s concept of the heterosexual matrix as being crucial for many

²² These are not the children’s real names

social science researchers in understanding this process. She goes on to explain how this pervasive imaginary (Chryst Ingraham, 1996) circulates in a masked fashion to become the norm through which sex and gender are re/produced.

Drawing on both Butler and Ingraham, Renold interprets the significance of these ideas for childhood and schooling as meaning that becoming a 'real' boy or a 'real' girl would encompass "desiring or growing up to desire the opposite sex" (2006, p. 493) and that the school is a site where sexualities are re/produced and contested. Amy Wallis and Jo VanEvery (2000) argue that compulsory heterosexuality is also reflected in the organization of many primary schools where patriarchal authority figures are embodied by male principals to the accompaniment of women teachers as mother figures thereby contributing to the schooling context as a site where heterosexuality is reinforced and normalized.

As a teacher I used to explain young children's imaginary games of playing house, or being mums and dads, as their learning, through their play, to come to terms with their social worlds. They were playing out known or desired realities and rehearsing for imagined futures (Epstein, 1997). Implicit in my explanation was a socialization theory of gender construction; that children learn gender roles through modelling or imitating the behaviour of others who they see as similar to them. Tacit approval from me, as I smiled benignly at their experimenting with culturally familiar sex roles, supposedly reinforced or rewarded their behaviour. Superficially, this notion of gender as roles learned by children through imitation, modelling and reinforcement as they interact with their environments is a plausible, if inadequate, description. A more sophisticated analysis drawing on queer theory reveals the presence of the heterosexual matrix in my rationalization of the children's play as well as in the games of Becky, Toby and Kevin. They are actively constructing their understandings of the institutions of the modern nuclear family and marriage as the

natural union between a man and a woman for the purpose of rearing and nurturing their young, be they merely pupys (puppies) or the offspring of royalty.

Glenda MacNaughton (1999) notes that children who try out different ways of doing gender especially in their pretend play risk “peer rejection, peer aggression and loneliness” (p. 81). This may in part explain my observations of Ash in the school playground. He seemed to be a loner in the playground and something of a forlorn figure. I never saw him playing in a group of children although his drawing of Totodile and Machop depicts him playing with friends, perhaps in a desired but imaginary game. He was always on his own and on several occasions appeared to be the target of aggression from a small group of slightly older boys. When I asked the children to draw pictures of themselves playing their games in the playground Ash chose to work on his own while most of the others chose to work in pairs or in small groups. There were no children in his drawing but there were numerous imaginary animals and figures. At the conclusion of the activity I asked him to interpret his picture for me which he did in a lively manner:

G. F.: Do you want to tell me about your work?

Ash: Yeah. I have been drawing Pokémon since I am very good at drawing them and I love to draw them and these aren't my best work because Kevin and Charles and B12 were talking and I couldn't do my best.

G. F.: And playing Pokémon, is that your favourite game?

Ash: Yeah because I am a very big fan of Pokémon.

G. F.: What is it that you like about Pokémon?

Ash: Well I like them because you get cards of them. They say like anything, like they say they are a cat and they don't say how much damage they have to die and I like playing it because you can choose more than Pokémon, like there's not just one Pokémon.

It appeared that in his playground play Ash inhabited his own fantasy world, from which he seemed to derive a great deal of satisfaction, as he played his imaginary Pokémon games and this may in turn have made the playground a potentially risky space for him. While not overtly crossing traditional gender boundaries to test out

different ways of doing gender, which according to MacNaughton (1999) makes children vulnerable to sanctioning by their peers such is the power of discourse to regulate bodies in playgrounds, what Ash was not being seen to be doing was aligning himself with the dominant gender norms as they were being produced, negotiated, embodied and performed in this context. Bronwyn Davies (2003) identifies what Ash is risking here when she stresses the importance of children learning the discursive practices of their worlds so that they can correctly position themselves and others as boys or girls; by not doing so Ash is risking his playground performance being seen as a failure. For example, he did not demonstrate his physical prowess by playing cricket with the sporting boys and he did not act out superhero roles of saving the world through brave acts of derring-do as described by some of the boys and neither he did indicate through his drawing that these were options for him. He did not take part in the pretend play of the groups of girls and boys where they actively constructed what it means to be a boy or a girl through reinforcing dominant gender norms such as boys behaving mischievously by making trouble for girls who display emphasized femininity in their rainbow fairy games. Queer theory suggests that the gender and gender relations being constructed through this play are regulated through the heterosexual matrix which according to Emma Renold (2005) means that normative masculinities are constructed as undeniably heterosexual. She goes as far as suggesting that sexuality is brought into question when dominant constructions of gender are resisted or rejected (2005, p. 107). Boys who do not demonstrably conform to normative masculinities in the playground risk a great deal. To be positioned as a failed boy in the playground is therefore akin to being positioned as a failed heterosexual.

What I saw happening on several occasions was Ash being chased by a small group of boys who laughed at him and teased him especially when he turned to face them apparently resisting their pursuit. No actual bodily contact was ever made as he half-heartedly kicked the playground bark at the boys who retaliated raising little

more than dust almost as though they were mimicking animals in a dispute over territory. After a short while the boys would run off laughing leaving Ash alone and looking a bit flustered but I could not really tell if he was relieved, shamed or perhaps excited by the confrontation. I observed the same scenario being repeated over a number of days but Ash was reluctant to talk to me about these incidents beyond agreeing that the boys sometimes picked on him. However, the fact that he persisted undeterred in his imaginative play would seem to indicate that he continued to derive pleasure and satisfaction from it.

While watching and thinking about this behaviour it occurred to me that there was something of a ritual or routine about these scenarios and that perhaps I was a witness to unsuccessful attempts being made at enforcing regulatory regimes of the playground. Judith Butler (1990) describes gender as what one does repeatedly in interactions with others rather than being an aspect of what one is. She draws on Foucault's account of the productive power of discourse to posit gender as performative, a process of 'becoming' through ritualized public performance, in that it is enacted within the discourses that shape and circulate in a particular social context such as a school playground. Presumably Ash's solitary, indeterminate and somewhat fey imaginative role play rendered his embodiment of gender unintelligible to these boys, especially when contrasted with the more robust play of his peers, and therefore needing to be sanctioned. In these moments of wounding, power was exercised by the group of boys to recognize and position Ash as Other because he did not conform to the dominant gender norms, to what these boys understand to be 'authentic' forms of masculine playground behaviour. This declaration of perceived weakness was witnessed by the members of the group of boys thus reinforcing the prevailing gender norms so that, in positioning Ash's behaviour as unrecognizable or deviant, the boys clarified and recognized their own

macho behaviour as normal and acceptable: we have a right to be (here), do you “Whaddarya?” (McGee, 1981, p. 96²³).

Butler (2011) argues that a gender performative succeeds, and then always and only conditionally, because actions, such as Ash’s being declared “other” by this group of boys because he does not conform to gender norms, echo prior actions and accumulate “the force of authority through repetition or citation of a prior, authoritative set of practices” (p. 172). Not only this but, in discursively reinforcing their dominant version of masculinity, the group of boys both cite and reproduce a discourse with a history that shapes its present use; a use through which they constitute themselves and others but also a use bodily inscribed which gives the illusion of stability and of being natural:

Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means (Butler, 2006, p. 185; original emphasis).

There were other examples of gender as performative, as “the repeated stylization of the body” (Butler, 2006, p. 45) in the playground behaviour of the children especially when the girls and boys played together. These occasions were also examples of a heterosexual imperative at work in the production of gender. For example, I observed a game of chasing but its significance only became apparent later when I discussed one of the girl’s drawings with her and she explained their game to me. The caption on Angel’s picture read:

²³ The Aotearoa New Zealand play *Foreskin’s Lament* mourns the passing of an age and a loss of innocence as it exposes the darker side of our rugby culture. The final monologue, the climax of the play, is an anguished dirge of anger, sorrow and despair as the young man Foreskin, the play’s central character, questions who and what we are by repeatedly intoning Whaddarya? Whaddarya?

Me and Becky are playing rainbow fairys (sic) we are playing it in the playground. Becky is Sumer the holiday fairy and I am Stella the star fairy. We are having adventures to find the things that Jack frost stole.

I had observed Angel and Becky chasing B12 in the playground and it turned out that their game was based on the *Rainbow Magic* series of fairy books by Daisy Meadows. B12 was cast as Jack Frost, the baddie of the stories and chased by the fairy heroines as retribution for his misdeeds. There are parallels here between the rainbow fairy storylines that the children were enacting and the various forms of playground harassment discussed by Thorne (1993), for instance, activities of girls being disrupted by boys either individually or in groups. The books' exposition of plot and the conflict between its characters perpetuate stereotypes of pitting good against evil with girls as the embodiment of virtue and with the one central male character as wickedness personified.

Perhaps, emboldened by the book scenarios, where girl-power restores the order that Jack Frost disrupts, the girls felt able to turn the tables on the boy. The chasing games seemed good natured enough going no further than excitement all round at the thrill of the chase although on one occasion B12 did use proximity to me as a safety zone or as 'time out'. By using the storylines from these heavily gendered books²⁴ with their exaggerated stereotypes as the fuel for their chasing games, the children were, as noted by Thorne (1993) and Epstein (1997), playing together in

²⁴ **Sample synopsis:** Best friends Rachel and Kirsty are holidaying on Rainspell Island. It is a magical place with emerald green fields dotted with buttercups and daisies, deep blue rock pools that shine like jewels, golden sandy beaches with tiny pink and white shells dotted about, big white cliffs and shimmering really deep blue-green seas. Their eyes open wide and their hearts thump with excitement, beat faster or miss a beat during their magical days under blue skies with the most amazing rainbows among the fluffy white clouds because... Rachel and Kirsty have a big secret! Naughty Jack Frost, aided by his wicked goblins, has banished the seven Rainbow Fairies from Fairyland with a magic spell. Now they are hidden on Rainspell Island. Until they are all found there will be no colour in Fairyland. Rachel and Kirsty have promised the Fairy King Oberon and his Queen Titania to help find Ruby the red fairy and her sisters Sky the blue fairy, Amber the orange fairy, Izzy the indigo fairy, Saffron the yellow fairy, Heather the violet fairy and Fern the green fairy so that once again they can keep all the colours of Fairyland shiny and bright using fairy dust from their silver-tipped wands.

games where gender is deeply discernible as an oppositional, heterosexual dualism. The work of Henri Tajfel (1982) is cited by Thorne to explain this as being when social interaction is mostly decided by the groups to which participants belong rather than by individual qualities and hence playground gendering practices of boys-against-the-girls or vice versa.



Figure 7: Playing rainbow fairies (Not to be reproduced without permission)

The fairies depicted in the books, on which Angel, Becky and B12 based their games are very 'girlie' figures symbolizing the conventional femininity, that Diane Reay

(2001) describes as comprising a 'limited and limiting discourse', and performing what Connell (1987) terms 'emphasised femininity'; the type of femininity that Marilyn Monroe embodied and parodied so well in her films in the 1950s. The fairies are wispy, graceful, rosy-cheeked, bejewelled creatures with sylphlike bodies decked out in fashionable, flimsy, frilly, pastel coloured clothes. Interestingly, this version of femininity is not re/produced in Angel's drawing. Her figures are not frilly or flimsy. They are solid, down-to-earth figures. Although in the drawing there are oblique references to this version of femininity, for instance both have long hair, large ruby red watermelon mouths, neat pastel coloured clothes, one in a pink top and the other with pink shoes, within the context of this playground game they seem to be contesting rather than constructing and performing a version of subordinate, heterosexual femininity that contrasts with more dominant versions of masculinity (Reay, 2001). There is a definite boldness in the drawing that contradicts the emphasized femininity of the storyline that Angel acknowledges as the inspiration for their playground game. Could this apparent contradiction be a reflection of what Ringrose (2013) describes as the discourse about 'girl power' (p. 12). She elaborates on this discourse by outlining its 'mythical qualities' whereby 'successful girls' embody "the best traits of masculinity and femininity" to be "confident, assertive, competitive, autonomous, future oriented, risk taking, as well as collaborative" (p. 12). The game of chasing and Angel's drawing certainly embody some of these qualities. They do appear to be self-assured, spirited and adventuresome. They play co-operatively and in doing so pit themselves against their opponent Jack Frost but there is more to this apparent paradox between the storyline of the fairy characters and Angel's depiction of them.

Drawing as she does on feminist poststructuralism and queer theory, Mindy Blaise's 2005 analysis of such gendered play *Playing it Straight: Uncovering Gender Discourses in the Early Childhood Classroom* enables us to understand the workings of power as relational in Angel, Becky and B12's chasing game, how their subjectivities are

“shifting, changing and at times contradictory” (p. 18) and, I would add, confusing, and just how these children are taking an active role in regulating the gendered social order in their playground. At first Angel identifies herself and Becky as “rainbow fairys (sic)” (from caption on Angel’s drawing) positioning them within the heterosexual discourse of femininity as embodied to achieve desirability through perfect bodies and fashionable clothes. Blaise describes this as “a form of sexism and social regulation” (p. 21) first defined in *Gender and Power* (Connell, 1987) as the most culturally valued, but not totally dominant, form of femininity defined as compliance to patriarchy “oriented around accommodating the interests and desires of men” (Blaise, p. 21). Angel then appears to appropriate a more potent discursive position stating that “we are having adventures”. Having adventures involves being bold and courageous, a position of power more stereotypically associated with masculinity yet, while simultaneously embodying a version of femininity subordinate to dominant masculinity, in their pretend play they are engaged in the vigorous activity of chasing Jack Frost in order to right his wrongs. There is an element of the morally good superhero who is strong and fast in pursuit of restoring order and saving the world when she explains that their goal was “to find the things that Jack frost (sic) stole”. However, in their role as fairies, they are also simply responding to Jack Frost’s mischievous actions and merely tidying up after him and in so doing seem to be reinforcing rather than disrupting the gender order.

Epstein (1997) and Epstein and Mellor (2006) emphasize that sexualities can never be expunged from the educational environment and that, despite being so closely scrutinized, primary school children know a great deal about (hetero)sexuality. They argue that school playgrounds, which are very much a part of their everyday lives and are less regulated than classrooms, are sites where, for example, chasing games can “become transmuted into arenas of sexualized chasing” (p. 39). Although I observed many chasing games in the playground at Anglerton, the kiss-chase variant described by Epstein (1997) and Thorne (1993), involving girls-chase the-

boys or boys-chase-the-girls to the accompaniment of lots of screaming and culminating in catching someone of the opposite sex and kissing them, appeared to escape my gaze. However, when talking with me about their playground games, two of the girls did describe a game of tag that was a very chaste version of the traditional chase-and-kiss.

G.F.: What other games do you play, like to play?

Daisy: I like to play with George and we, um, we, um, we play tag. And, um, and we made up a game, and it's called huggie, and the person that, um, a person is the hugger, and if he hugs you, you turn into a hugger and there's two huggers. And when everybody is a hugger then, um, then it's finished.

When I tried to see if there was anything more than just hugging involved the girls just giggled and would tell me no more about that particular game. I was left wondering if, as I had been positioned by the children as a student teacher and hence a quasi-authority figure within the school, the children were self-censoring their accounts of their games for fear of admitting to breaking some 'rules' or taboos especially in the light of the ways in which, according to Foucault, we as adults are said to police children's sexual potentials.

The Shene Playground

As an inner-city school in a lower socio-economic area, Shene Primary School, one of Christchurch's oldest schools, lacks the broad open spaces of a neighbouring park but it does have its own large playground area. This space is bordered by a mixture of large, mature trees including both native and exotic species. Of particular note are several well-established stands combining tī kōuka/the cabbage tree and harakeke/flax. Unlike Anglerton, where the buildings are connected with covered walkways and positioned at different angles so as to create a number of small courtyards, the buildings at Shene, some of which date from the 1950s and show

their age, are all sited along the school's southern boundary. The area immediately in front of the junior school is paved and is separated from the large grassy area by a sandpit, an adventure playground and some of the plantings of tī kōuka and harakeke. There are a few markings painted on the paved area but these hopscotch and four square grids have begun to fade.

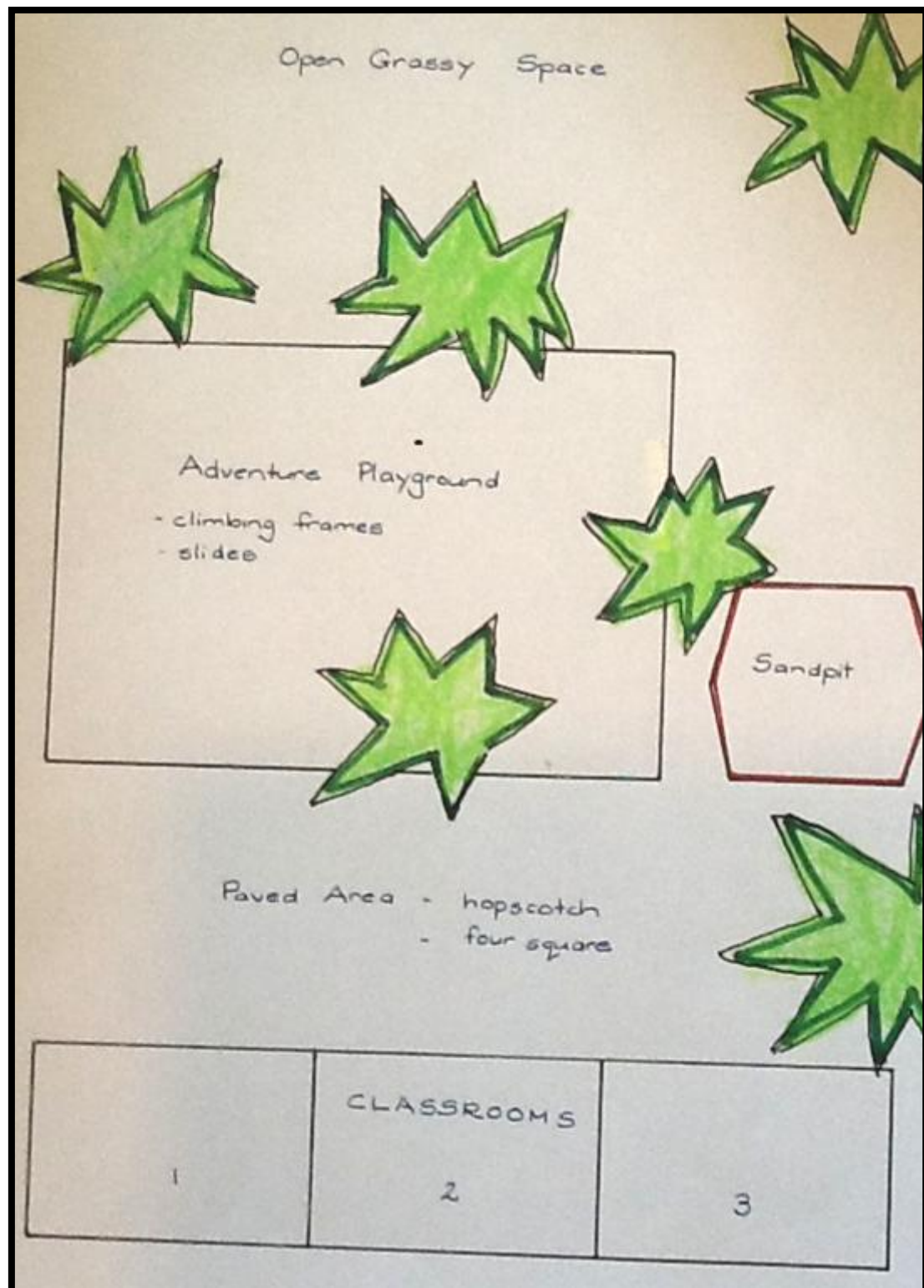


Figure 8: The Shene Playground

It was mid-winter when I observed the Shene children so their play was largely confined to the paved areas, the sandpit and the climbing frames, slides and other structures of the adventure playground. The grassed area was 'out of bounds' for

much of the time because it was too wet to use and on several occasions the weather did not permit outdoor play at all. When given a choice, many of the girls chose to remain inside the classroom during playtimes. Apart from the time of year and the inclement weather, the children's play at Shene also appeared to be more limited because of the resources available to them. Little equipment, such as bats and balls, was made available and the children seemed to have to rely on their own resources. The school did have equipment for physical education lessons which I observed being used every day but this gear was stowed in the school hall and not made available for use in the playground. On the few occasions when I was able to observe the children playing outdoors their play did show the high degree of separation between the genders noted in other studies (Thorne, 1993; Connolly, 2003). The boys confined themselves to the sandpit where they played with toy cars making roads and garages while the girls played on the more open paved area or the climbing frames in the adventure playground. This constituted a reversal of the playground at Anglerton where the most open area was used by boys playing cricket. Barrie Thorne (1993; 2002) argues that a high degree of separation may give rise to particular discourses circulating through such social practices but is quick to concede that other situations may challenge such constructions of gender:

When kids maneuver (sic) to form same-gender groups on the playground or organize a kickball game as "boys-against-the-girls," they produce a sense of gender as dichotomy and opposition. And when girls and boys work cooperatively on a classroom project, they actively undermine a sense of gender as opposition (1993, p. 4).

Carrie Paechter (2007) quotes a number of research findings²⁵, including those of Barrie Thorne (1993), Paul Connolly (2003) and Lia Karsten (2003), to maintain that the most noticeable feature of most playgrounds is the preponderance of team games

²⁵ Derived from research conducted in such different cultural settings as Amsterdam, Northern Ireland, England and California

usually played by dominant groups of boys and how these boys control much larger spaces than girls or boys not included in their games. For example, Paechter (2007) notes that two-thirds of the playground in her study was taken up by football. At Anglerton the cricket game that I observed would have taken up more than half of the available grassy space. Interestingly, in the absence of access to the grassed area it was the confined space of the sandpit to which the Shene boys gravitated and the area of the playground which they tended to monopolize. The group regularly included Batman, Spiderman and Buzz and their play revolved around toy cars. The way in which the demarcations between what were constituted as girls' games and boys' games at Shene worked, and hence Thorne's (1993, 2002) notion of the production of gender as dichotomy and opposition, was illustrated for me when one of the girls showed me her skipping rope. I was sitting in the playground when Mara came up to me and proudly showed me her new skipping that her Nana had given her. I was amazed. The skipping ropes that I recall from teaching physical education lessons, and that were made available for the children to use at playtimes, were simple lengths of somewhat inflexible plain coir rope. Shorter lengths fostered individual skipping while longer lengths would be turned by a child at each end with several children taking turns to skip individually or at times several children skipping together. Mara's creation was a much more sophisticated and heavily gendered piece of equipment. It was a Disney Princess product, apparently just one of over 25,000 products (England *et al.* 2011), consisting of innumerable small heart-shaped pieces of plastic, which Mara described as 'love-hearts', threaded onto some sort of inner core and designed for individual skipping. Not surprisingly, the 'love-hearts' were pink and purple which Spiderman, who was standing close by, described somewhat dismissively as "girl colours". Although he did not say it explicitly, pink and purple were obviously not for him since he was not a girl and therefore neither was skipping which was clearly being discursively constructed as an appropriate activity for girls. The handles of the skipping rope confirmed this. They were adorned with female characters from Disney animated films which Mara

identified for me as “Snow White”, “Cinderella” and “The Little Mermaid”. Mara was visibly delighted with her rope for with it she would be able to get a handle on getting gender ‘right’ in the playground. It simultaneously satisfied and shaped her desire.

The Disney Princess products first appeared in 2001 and were accompanied by an advertising campaign which aimed to “attract a wide audience of girls with the ultimate goal of encouraging children to personally identify with the characters so that they will purchase the associated products” (England *et al.* 2011, p. 555); products with gendered messages that incorporate stereotypical representations of femininity—emphasized femininity, influenced by heterosexual discourses incorporating “society’s expectations of males and females to fall in love and sexually desire a member of the opposite sex (Blaise, 2005, p. 21). For instance, Celeste Lacroix’s 2004 analysis of six Disney animated films, on which the products are based, shows that although more recent Disney heroines have a more active physical presence they still have small delicate frames and the implausibly lissome limbs of a Barbie doll. They “continue to be drawn with tiny waists, small breasts, slender wrists, legs and arms and still move with the fluidity of the ballet model used for the older Disney animated films” (p. 220). Angela McRobbie (2008) argues that consumer culture, within which Disney products exert a powerful influence, now usurps the influence of older institutions such as the family and education to contribute to a new ‘girlhood’ defined and regulated by the consumption of these products together with their gendered messages. She expresses concern that these forms of commercialism draw on a liberal feminist discourse to celebrate female freedom and equality and to suggest that feminist struggles are a thing of the past (McRobbie, 2008). She argues that very young children are being subtly drawn into a ‘normative post-feminist femininity’ that amounts to a form of re-subordination (McRobbie, 2008). The discursive valorisation of emphasized femininity in the Disney princess skipping rope that Mara found so appealing and that Spiderman

distanced himself from is illustrative of her disquiet. And neither do boys altogether escape the influence of consumer culture as a form of Foucauldian governmentality which urges them to recognize themselves and to be recognized by others through the currency of sportswear and sporting memorabilia. Jon Swain (2000) maintains that for many boys:

the image of the ideal, quintessential (heterosexual) man resides in the professional game of football, and is communicated through the media of television, film, video, books and magazines, with all its connotations of athleticism, muscularity, strength, power and fearless domination (p. 101).

When I asked a small number of Shene children to draw themselves playing in their playground a more familiar pattern resulted and dominant discourses could again be identified (Figures 6 & 7). The two groups of boys drew games of soccer and indicated the centrality of sport to their playground experiences by saying that this was their chosen activity when the grassed area was not 'out of bounds'. When I asked what they liked about soccer, 'because it is a lot of fun running around' and 'scoring goals' were the replies. Both of their pictures suggest that their soccer games took up a lot of open playground space although this is depicted in different ways. While the stature of the boys in Figure 9 is on the small side, the boys are spread widely across the field, whereas in Figure 10 thickset boys have been drawn boldly occupying almost all of the available space and thereby replicating the way in which the games of cricket that I observed at Anglerton commandeered the largest share of the most prominent playground space thereby defining that area and the activities that took place there as decidedly masculine.



Figure 9: Playing soccer with my friends (Not to be reproduced without permission)



Figure 10: We are playing soccer (Not to be reproduced without permission)

My observations of the Shene playground as a gender segregated space were reinforced when I asked if the girls played soccer with the boys. The answer was a definite 'no' but Batman did admit that a girl played in his Saturday soccer team but, ordering the genders hierarchically and perhaps positioning her as something of an intrusion, he quickly added that she was "not much good". This comment and those about 'scoring goals' and 'running around' are examples of the way Jon Swain (2000)

describes football (soccer²⁶) as being “replete with masculinising meanings and practices” and “as a medium in *one* of the arenas in which gender identities are constructed, negotiated and performed” (p. 96; original emphasis).

The animated talk of the ‘soccer boys’ at Shene clearly demonstrated that they derived much pleasure and satisfaction from taking part in games of soccer and from using their bodies to demonstrate and develop skills and qualities such as strength and power. It is in this way that games such as soccer and the discourses associated with them play an important role for these boys in the construction of their gender identities and as signifiers for them of the masculine ideals of being competitive, physically strong, forceful, and goal oriented.

Elements of emphasized femininity were incorporated into the girls’ picture of themselves playing in the sandpit demonstrating Margaret White’s contention that artmaking is a chance for children to make meaning of their lives and in their drawings “children are actively shaping their view of themselves (1998, p. 223). The drawing label indicated that they were playing ‘mums and dads’ thus imbuing their imaginary game within a familiar storyline perhaps, like Disney’s princesses, imagining “their futures as tied up with heterosexual romance” (Epstein, 1997, p. 39).

²⁶ In May 2007, the governing body for the sport of association football in New Zealand “was renamed New Zealand Football (NZF), replacing the word “soccer” with “football” in line with the common usage in the rest of the world” (Wikipedia). However, many in New Zealand still retain the word soccer preferring to call rugby, the unofficial national sport of New Zealand, the ‘footy’ or ‘the football’. When I interviewed secondary school pupils about sport and how it influenced their ideas about gender, soccer in New Zealand was positioned as inferior to rugby and described as ‘prissy’ and ‘girlish’ (Ferguson, 2004). However, some of the young men explained that they started out playing soccer but finding it ‘not physical enough’ moved on the ‘real’ man’s game of rugby.



Figure 11: We are playing Mums and Dads (Not to be reproduced without permission)

The two feminine figures are suitably slim with slender limbs reminiscent of the Disney heroines. Both are wearing pink tops, a colour popular with younger girls and the colour 'girly-girls' love (Paechter, 2010), and one has accentuated frilly sleeves. Both are wide-eyed, have long hair and smile boldly with their large red lips. Their stance is intriguing for each holds a spade in one hand, presumably for digging in the sand, while the other arm is held aloft as though in the act of hailing a friend. There is certain jauntiness to them as though, with an audience in mind, they have carefully arranged their bodies in this pose, or perhaps are trying out this particular action or attitude, which embodies and expresses their youthful (heterosexual?) femininity. In her 2005 study of how children actively do gender in an early childhood classroom, Mindy Blaise identified a number of different gender discourses including 'wearing femininities' and 'body movements' both of which appear to be depicted here. The drawing shows the girls getting gender 'right' by the clothing they wear and by the way they arrange their bodies. She acknowledges

Raewyn Connell as first coining the term ‘emphasized femininity’ in 1987²⁷ and defines it as all about “compliance with subordination” and being “oriented around accommodating the interests and desires of men” (p. 21). It would seem that, through this meaning-making act of simply depicting themselves at play in the sandpit, the girls are not only taking pains to present themselves as recognizably feminine to themselves but also as recognizable to the unseen audience of the opposite sex. Is that who they salute with their raised arms and could this performance be interpreted as a rehearsal for adolescent (hetero)sexuality?

Some Concluding Thoughts

In this analysis I have explored the embodied processes and practices employed by various groups of children in these two schools playgrounds to construct their gendered identities. It confirms playgrounds as important school spaces where children’s understanding of themselves as girls and boys are discursively produced, reinforced, and at times contested. In keeping with the notion that young children’s gendered identities are multiple, fluid and at times contradictory, I have focussed more on the workings of gender production, especially interpersonal interactions and practices, rather than attempting to identify a range of masculinities by creating some form of typology. Jon Swain describes typologies as “too simplistic, limiting, and restrictive and unable adequately to illustrate the real-life complexities of pupil identities” (2006, p. 335). However, one issue that I would like to consider is the question of whether or not there were any differences in the versions of masculinity and femininity I was able to observe and identify in the two different schools.

²⁷ Interestingly, Connell and co-author James W. Messerschmidt, in a 2005 rethinking of the concept of hegemonic masculinity, describe gender as “always relational, and patterns of masculinity are socially defined in contradistinction from some model (whether real or imaginary) of femininity” and go on to argue that the concept of emphasized femininity “is still highly relevant in contemporary mass culture (p. 848).

Connolly (2003) noticed that the forms of masculinity that predominate in schools tend to be a reflection of the nature of their local areas with more middle-class localities giving rise to “competition around knowledge and expertise in particular games” (p. 125) rather than sheer physicality. Although the localities surrounding Shene and Anglerton schools differed in terms of ethnicity and socio-economic status, and Anglerton’s playground was better resourced, I did not detect significant differences in the gender dynamics of the two different playgrounds. This may simply be because I had fewer opportunities to observe at Shene due to it being winter and the children spending more time indoors. Perhaps this is a question better left for a future research project. What can be said though is that within each school there was considerable variation in the forms of both masculinity and femininity that could be identified in the children’s play. Nevertheless, it is also clear from this analysis that the discursive resources drawn on by the children to produce their understandings of being boys and girls do tend to incorporate certain dominant discourses, for example, boys as stereotypically active, sporty and physically tough individuals and girls as more passive and deferential. However, this interpretation glosses over the ambiguity, complexity and diversity that are clearly also part of the picture in both schools.

What is also apparent from this analysis of children’s play is the active role they play in constructing and negotiating their own gender identities and the role that the playground rituals and practices plays as they fashion themselves into gendered subjects. Sex role socialization theories or explanations of gender differences as resulting from biology alone do not adequately capture the complexities and nuances of the dynamics that come into play in school playgrounds as children learn about being boys and being girls.

Chapter 7

Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose

The more things change, the more they remain the same.

There are times in life when the question of knowing if one can think differently than one thinks, and perceive differently than one sees, is absolutely necessary if one is to go on looking and reflecting at all (Foucault, 1984/1987, p. 8).

It is not, however, a simple task to see, think and do differently (Allan, 2009, p. 2)

In describing the role of the artist, the Cubist painter, essayist and poet e. e. cummings is reputed to have once declared that:

The Symbol of all Art is the Prism. The goal is destructive. To break up the white light of objective realism into the secret glories it contains.

There is an art to research and I liken my role as a researcher to that of the artist as encapsulated in these few words of e. e. cummings. However, my aim has been de/constructive rather than destructive. With each project I set out to take that white light of 'reality', in this case the all too familiar territory of the classroom and the school playground, and through processes of analysis and reflection (refraction) explore its complexities, the 'secret glories', that spectrum of colours that for many of us remain hidden or at least is understood in an entirely different light, for instance, through the lenses of essentialism or Developmentalism. Through employing an innovative mix of data generating strategies, not unlike that of a many sided prism, I have been able to distinguish the diversity and the complexities involved as young children fashion for themselves their particular versions of masculinities and femininities. The research project was undertaken amid current concerns about boys in education which since the 1990s have continuously suggested that the education

of boys in Aotearoa New Zealand has been at risk (Alton-Lee & Praat, 2000). Specifically, the project aimed to address what researchers such as Louisa Allen (2009) and Anne-Marie O'Neill (2005) have argued is lacking in Aotearoa New Zealand, namely, coming to a better understanding of issues related to boys' educational achievement through an examination of "the nature of masculinity along with the processes, rituals, practices and dispositions through which boys and men 'make' themselves (that is attain a gendered identity within a distinctly gendered culture)" (O'Neill, 2005, p. 99). The research analysis brings to light the complexities and at times the contestatory nature of the gendering processes that come into play in different settings within schools. It calls into question the adequacy of framing the debates about boys and their schooling "through a narrow binary conception of gender so that the unitary category of 'girl' is simplistically pitted against the unitary category of 'boy' (Ringrose, 2007) as a degree of diversity was evident in the schooling experiences and behaviours of different groups of boys and girls. Although it was a challenge, using a poststructural feminist approach to this early childhood research project proved to be a powerful way of understanding how dynamic and multifaceted young children's gendering processes are. Despite the fact that, under the influence of Neoliberal globalization, the educational landscape in Aotearoa New Zealand has been transformed²⁸ and shifts have occurred in the societal expectations of schools, from schools contributing to the development of community minded citizens to the production of individual consumers who must now take individual responsibility for their own lives, questions have to be asked about how much has changed in terms of the day-to-day dynamics of classroom and playground interaction patterns. These gendered patterns of behaviour were one of the concerns addressed by feminist educational studies into schooling during the 1970s and 1980s and examples of these same

²⁸ Since 1984, when the fourth Labour Government took office and introduced market oriented policies including the implementation of educational reforms under Tomorrow's Schools in 1989, successive administrations in Aotearoa New Zealand, of whatever political hue, have relied on a hegemonic discourse of individualism, individual responsibility, competition and the mechanisms of the market place to deliver social justice generally and social equity in education (Lauder, 1990).

interaction patterns are still to be found in our schools today. Sitting alongside the current discourses of 'failing boys', 'the boy problem' and 'boys at risk', Jessica Ringrose identifies "a new celebratory discourse about successful girls" (p. 471). She positions this discourse, which she describes *à la* Valerie Walkerdine as a new 'school girl fiction', as postfeminist and describes how it is deployed as a signifier that neoliberal policies in education are working; that individual success is to be derived from making the most of all opportunities and working hard to achieve one's goals. In Foucauldian terms individuals under neoliberalism are self-governing subjects who take care of themselves and are able to regulate themselves into productive, 'docile bodies' that work hard in order to profit from every opportunities and thus are able to enjoy educational success at school just as these girls do. But educational success, narrowly defined in terms of test results or passes in high stakes examinations at senior levels of secondary schooling, glosses over or completely ignores how, for the past thirty years, research into girls' schooling experiences has consistently shown them to be marginalised, belittled and undermined in both classroom and school playgrounds (Francis, 2005). It appears that for many girls it is a case of continuity rather than change and hence the title of this chapter. It is these issues then that form the basis of this discussion as I reflect on the educational significance of this research project and consider its implications for us as teachers and teacher educators.

Utilising a poststructural feminist approach has enabled me to demonstrate the inadequacies of essentialist explanations of gender by documenting how boys (and girls) individually and collectively fashion themselves into gendered individuals. Rather than seeing them as merely adults in the making who are shaped by their social world, a poststructural perspective makes it possible to view even very young children as active agents who from context to context within institutions such as school continually form and reform themselves discursively. What is emphasized in a research project of this nature is the importance of engaging with children on their

own terms, observing them closely in their everyday activities, and listening carefully to them in order to come to understand the complexities involved as they fashion themselves into their desired ways of being boys and being girls. My project illustrates how making use of a rich variety of research strategies, such as focus group discussions, observations, videotaping and analysis of participants drawings can result in the 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973, p. 5) necessary to paint a detailed picture of the regime of practices at work to regulate and monitor the conduct of individuals (Martino, 2000, p 102). Close attention in this way makes it possible to observe children engaging in a process of positioning themselves or of being positioned by others within gendered social discourses and thereby fashioning themselves and others into desirable and intelligible subjects. This process of constructing and negotiating subjectivities can be seen as a process of self-legitimation that becomes a source of pleasure and gives the individual a sense of belonging, of being accepted and possibly admired by peers (Keddie, 2003). What soon became apparent in this project was the importance of bodies in the production of subjectivities. Becoming boys and becoming girls involves more than just verbal language. What boys do with and through their bodies is intimately bound up with who they think they are and who they want to become. Through Butler's (1997) notion of performativity I came to see the relevance of their bodies in performing, enacting and 'doing' gender. It is a process of embodiment and amounts to a 'technology of the self' (Foucault, 1988), whereby boys actively fashion themselves, their bodies, into certain desirable ways of being as they continuously try to work out and work at what being a boy means in any particular context.

Poststructuralist feminism also provided a framework for investigating relations of power that circulate in and permeate the production of boys' gendered subjectivities, their multiple masculinities. It soon became apparent that certain ways of being were constituted as more desirable than others and carried more prestige. For instance, some boys constructed very limited and limiting understandings of masculinity by

distancing themselves from anything feminine. For them establishing an intelligible, dominant masculine subjectivity in this way involved a process of abjection and denigration (“I don’t want to be a freak!”) with the weak, the dependent, the feminine and any hints of effeminacy being expelled (Davies, 2004). Deconstructing or unpicking this discursive construction through using a poststructural feminist approach reveals how binaries such as boy/girl and masculine/feminine, taken-for-granted assumptions in essentialist accounts of gender, are held in place hierarchically in this way and operate to marginalize certain groups or individuals. Poststructural theorizing posits this constituting of the self as a continuing process and masculinities as multiple, not stable and fixed but always in a process of becoming. There is therefore the potential for transformation by the production of less restrictive and limited understandings of masculinities. Mindy Blaise (2005) has described this constituting of subjectivities in limited ways as an example of *categorical thinking*. There is a sense in which abjecting the Other, spitting out that which threatens to contaminate, constitutes a Foucauldian ‘technology of the self’ (1998) involving transforming the self so as to attain a desired state of ‘purity’. For some boys this process results in very restrictive ways of being in the world and hints at a potential for a lack of tolerance of difference and diversity on their parts. Perhaps it is this categorical thinking that ought to be a feature of the ‘boys at risk’ discourse rather than solely focusing on educational achievement? Fortunately, as feminist poststructuralism allows us to think of identity not as being fixed and stable but as fluid and open to change, then disrupting or challenging such instances of categorical thinking would be a good first step in paving the way for less restrictive ways of thinking and ways of being. There is also another dimension to the issue that arise for those boys who continually define themselves in contrast to girls and anything they perceive to be feminine. Even though we may wish to resist the narrowness of the neoliberal discourse that positions schools and their pupils as serving the needs of the national economy (Snook, 2009), we do need to take note of evolving changes in labour market patterns. As has been noted (Allen, 2009) declines

in the manufacturing industry, where many young men traditionally found employment, have been accompanied by an expansion of employment opportunities in the service sector. The workplace ideals of this sector are often relationship orientated placing a premium on interpersonal and intrapersonal skills such as good communication, listening, caring, empathy and social and emotional competence. Since these skills “are associated with conventional notions of femininity” (Allen, 2009, p. 125) boys who distance themselves from femininity may be disadvantaging themselves when it comes to future employment opportunities.

Learning to think in these ways and coming to these understandings was not an easy process. Having worked with young children for many years, positioning them and understanding them as active meaning makers was relatively straightforward after all I had studied Piaget's theory of cognitive development in the late 1960s when I trained to be a teacher. The child or the learner, within this paradigm, which Valerie Walkerdine (2004) by employing Foucauldian thinking has been able to describe as one of science's powerful, regulatory ‘grand metanarratives’, is an energetic, assertive, inquiring, and creative thinker. But, as has been pointed out by Walkerdine, this theory, and in particular its conception of the ‘ideal’ learner, effectively ‘universalizes the masculine’ by tending “to implicitly define the child as a male” (p.103). Seeing otherwise when these ‘truths’ of Developmentalism have become so embedded in our thinking is no easy task and it took me quite a lot longer to realize fully the significance of the call to understand children “as social actors *shaping* as well as *shaped* by their circumstances” (James *et al.* 1998, p.6 my emphasis) or as Alan Prout later articulated it:

Children must be seen as active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live. Children are not just passive subjects of social structures and processes (2005, p. 60).

Knowing schools as I did, with their routines, rules, regulations and disciplinary structures all designed to regulate and discipline the individual and the collective student body, and having been a part of those structures and processes for so long, I failed to anticipate the extent to which young boys through their schooling practices could shape not only their own circumstances but also the circumstances of those around them. It took repeated viewings of the videotaped lessons before, like Saul, the scales fell from my eyes. St. Pierre (2000) depicts Humanism as “the air we breathe, the language we speak, the shape of the homes we live in, the relations we are able to have with others...and, since it is so “natural,” it is difficult to watch it at work” (p. 478). Foucault expresses the same sentiment when he challenges us “to recognize the hidden regime of knowledge power beneath the rituals of its performance” (1984/1987 p. 9). The same could be said of Developmentalism²⁹ for my generation of teachers, and ‘developmentally appropriate practice’ which is so entrenched in our thinking and traditions in early childhood education. However, like Mindy Blaise, a feminist poststructuralist perspective enabled me to “make sense of teaching, learning and young children in new ways” (2005, p. 3). Eventually I was able to interpret examples of classroom and playground interactions, that would be positioned by developmental thinking as ‘natural’, boys being boys and girls will be good, as instances of the continuation of trends in gendered behaviour that have been clearly identified in numerous earlier research studies.

It is now nearly ten years since Becky Francis reported on a literature review of the previous thirty years of research into gendered classroom relations and playground cultures (2005). Her account outlines the accumulation of evidence of tendencies for boys to dominate physical and verbal space and “the ways in which girls tend to defer to boys” (p. 9). She also uses her own current research in secondary schools to

²⁹ Children are seen as active participants in the learning processes, play is emphasized as the natural way young children learn, and knowledgeable teachers provide appropriate experiences and select teaching methods in accordance with the developmental stage of the class as a whole and the needs of individual children (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

illustrate these trends. She describes girls as tending to be 'out-voiced' (2005, p. 10) by boys in co-educational classrooms and boys taking up more space both in classrooms and in playgrounds (2005, p. 13) and portrays this as being reflective of power differences and struggles. She is, however, careful to point out that such behaviour does not apply to all girls or all boys (2005, p. 10). Examples of these patterns of classroom and playground behaviour were evident in my research project suggesting that such tendencies, although not characteristic of all children, do manifest themselves in some pupils at an early age perhaps contributing to and being expressions of the way in which gender is constructed relationally. I also observed occasions, especially at Shene, where the restlessness of some boys was to a certain extent accommodated but one or two of the girls were sharply chastised for displaying similar fidgety behaviour. Perhaps it is the case that we as teachers continue to have different expectations of children depending on their gender and in so doing contribute to the processes of constructing genders as opposites with the ideal girl pupil constructed as "appropriately reticent, conscientious and demure in the classroom...helpful and obedient" (Francis, 2005, p. 15) in contrast to boys as energetic, enthusiastic, creative thinkers who also happen to be a little demanding. By deferring to the demands of boys, especially when they flout classroom rules of acceptable behaviour by, for example calling out and interrupting others and in so doing monopolizing 'verbal space', we may be inadvertently contributing to and reinforcing the discursive construction of males and their ways of knowing as more important and more powerful.

One of the concerns that arises with the predominance of the discourses of boys and their schooling being 'at risk' and 'the boy problem' in education, which in part is due to the neoliberal drive for individual responsibility, standards and achievement thereby making issues of 'underachievement' more visible, is the presumption that if girls are doing so well in examination results now then any earlier problems with their classroom experiences must have all been addressed. Ringrose (2007) maintains

that the most concerning outcome of these postfeminist, neoliberal educational discourses is that the focus on the problem of boys and ‘underachievement’ “has now resulted in a massive neglect of girls in terms of resource allocation and policy and research concerns” (p. 473). Fortunately in Aotearoa New Zealand, and mainly due to the measured approach taken by Alton-Lee and Praat in their 2000 Ministry of Education commissioned review into gender differences in schools, no large-scale nationally resourced policy or interventions on behalf of boys has occurred.

However, this has meant that some individual schools have allocated resources to experimenting with boys-only classes. Research has shown that a business as usual pedagogical approach in these classes or in fact modifying practices to make these classes more ‘boy-friendly’ can lead to “practices that essentialize the categories of boys and girls” (Martino *et al.* 2004, p. 450). Francis’ review (2005) and this research project indicate that a business as usual approach in regular classes, in terms of gender relations through the perpetuation of dominant stereotypical masculinities and femininities, may be disadvantageous to some girls as some boys monopolise time and space and are deferred to, but may also be detrimental to those boys who construct their understandings of masculinities in limited and limiting ways.

Revisiting William’s Doll

Understanding that gender inequities are discursively produced and working from a feminist poststructuralist perspective, I want to consider possibilities for reworking restrictive masculinities, in particular, within classroom settings in meaningful ways that will be beneficial for the social and educational outcomes of both boys and girls. By way of introduction I want to revisit my use of *William’s Doll* in the focus group discussions to illustrate some of the complexities involved when we seek to use the narrative structure of children’s books to disrupt or deconstruct the masculine-feminine dualism through which many children construct their subjectivities as either boys or girls. I selected *William’s Doll* since it was a simple story with which I

was familiar and because of William's gender-transgressive behaviour. Although my main aim was to open up a space for young children to talk about what being male or female actually meant for them and perhaps to see how the difference between the two were discursively established and policed, I also thought the use of stories that depict non-stereotypical behaviour might be a useful technique that classroom teachers could use to move children beyond the masculine-feminine dualism. However it was only when I revisited the book in the course of writing up my research that I began to see it and some of what happened in the focus group discussions in a completely different light.

Yes, William does yearn for a doll, a 'girls' toy', just like the girl next door has, a quintessentially female doll with "blue eyes and curly lashes and a long white dress and a bonnet" (Zolotow, 1972, p. 12). He longs to care for it, to love it, to cuddle and cradle it in his arms and he is depicted as healthy young boy with a mop of tousled, fair hair (presumably the illustrator, William Pène du Bois, was reflecting 1970s hippie fashion trends) but William also spends an awful lot of time engaging in quite conventional 'boy activities'. His father buys him a basketball and an electric train set. He practices and practices with the ball and gets to be good at it, so good that he is shown athletically competing against and apparently running rings around his former tormentors, his big brother and the boy next door. He is shown to be good at construction as he makes accessories, tunnels, bridges and stations, for the train set which he also plays with a lot. Although William appears to be expressing a degree of agency in attempting to shape and satisfy his own desires, and therein influence attitudes of those around him, it is an adult who defines and imposes his ultimate heterosexual destiny upon him. His grandmother's retort to William's angry and upset father after she has bought the doll for William:

"He needs it, she said, "to hug and to cradle and to take to the park so that *when he's a father like you*, he'll know how to take care of his baby... (Zolotow, 1972, p. 30 my emphasis).

Can this storyline really pass as a feminist tale and could my use of it with the children be said to begin to deconstruct gender roles when there is so much about it that is quite conventional and the ultimate outcome of the storyline is to be a heteronormative family structure? The answer, of course, is to be found in the way many of the boys' resistances to the storyline were framed by Butler's notion of the 'heterosexual matrix'³⁰. As well as failing to see the extent to which the text was infiltrated by normative gender discourses on which the children could draw to construct their subjectivities, what I failed to take into account was the strength of meanings, the gendered discourses that the children brought *to* the text. We assume that the meaning is to be found in a text. While, on one level, I was not naïve enough to accept that "language simply names and reflects what it encounters" (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 480) so that there is no one fixed readings of a text, I somehow expected that Zolotow's feminist meaning, that people should be able to be what they really want to be, would be readily available to be taken up by the children. In fact Batman (Shene Focus Group 6) 'heard' a quite different storyline. He insisted that William was unhappy and cried when his grandmother gave him the doll. He was attending to only part of the text, as in fact I had done, and finding enough in it to support his existing ideas about gender as well as being able to subvert another aspect of the storyline to fit the meanings he brought *to* the text. In effect, if not in intention, I had created a set of circumstances where, for some children, I was reinforcing, or enabling them to, rather than problematizing the dominant and restrictive ways of thinking. My failure to realize initially all that was going on in our discussions illustrates the complexities of gender, as it is constructed relationally through social

³⁰ I set out to explore children's constructions of gender, how masculinities were played out in school settings. Although I knew children were not 'gender innocent' I implicitly positioned them as innocent in matters of sex and it was only after seeing several references to 'girlfriends' in research transcripts that I really focussed on queer theory and began to understand how "the heterosexual matrix regulates gender and gender relations so that heterosexuality becomes the "normal" and only way to be" (Blaise, 2005, p. 22).

interactions, but it also highlights the difficulties of understanding fully some of the techniques children use to reduce that complexity as they actively make sense of their gendered and gendering experiences (Davies, 1989, 1993). A salutary lesson then for us as teachers is that while we may think we are doing one thing, something quite different may be happening for the learners which, come to think of it, is not solely confined to the realms of trying to interrupt the gender boundaries defined and navigated by young children.

Although using feminist poststructuralism and queer theory has made it possible for me to observe and listen to children in order to interpret their talk and activities in and out of the classroom in different ways, doing so is not easy. Identifying strategies that we as educators can use to begin to address schooling issues for boys, both social and academic, that move beyond essentialist 'common sense' based solutions is also not straightforward. Perhaps improving teacher threshold knowledges is a good first step, and I do not just mean about gender theory and gender issues. Teachers need to tune into, listen to and observe closely the children they work with so as to become more aware of how gender is being negotiated, embodied and enacted in their particular set of circumstances. Knowledge gathered on an on-going basis in this way is a necessary prerequisite for informed decision making in this area. This is of particular importance in the light of research findings (Hattie, 2009, 2012; Lingard et al., 2003) that support "the view that teachers and their pedagogical practices are central to enhancing student learning and achievement" (Martino et al., 2004, p. 450). Researchers working in both the Aotearoa New Zealand and Australian contexts have explored the effects of teachers' threshold knowledges and how, despite a lack of sound research-based evidence, certain discourses, gender regimes (Connell, 2002) and 'regimes of truth' continue to be maintained and relied upon by teachers and decision makers within schools.

As a case in point, Alton-Lee (2005) discusses an instance of a specific, widespread knowledge, or common-sense assumption that underpins the practice of many teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand schools. She refers to a 2003 report³¹ produced by Te Tari Arotake Matauranga the New Zealand Education Review office that shows the widespread use of the learning styles approach in Aotearoa New Zealand schools. Alton-Lee then discusses conclusions from case study research³² showing that “the approach has been found to be linked to less effective instructional experiences for Māori and Pasifika than for other learners in junior class mathematics” (Alton-Lee, 2005, p. 4). This was found to occur because of a tendency to classify Māori and Pasifika children, very often boys, as kinaesthetic learners and to promote the use of tangible equipment such as blocks for these children while other children “focussed on metacognitive strategies (for which there is by contrast, strong research evidence of positive links to higher achievement)” (Alton-Lee, 2005, p. 4).

In the Australian context Wayne Martino, Bob Lingard and Martin Mills (2004) investigated the results of teacher threshold knowledge about boys in one co-educational school that actively promoted a ‘boy friendly’ philosophy and which took pride in its capacity “to implement certain strategies and programs (sic) for addressing boys’ educational and social needs” (p. 440). These strategies, such as explicit teaching within structured programmes and activity based learning arising from the fact that boys were seen as being “predisposed to being active” (p. 442), had been developed and promoted by the principal as a result of his experience and knowledge of boys’ education. The research documented these strategies and explored the consequences when “the desirable teacher threshold knowledges about the social construction of gender were absent (p. 440). In the absence of these

³¹ Education Review Office. (2003). *Māori in Mainstream Schools*. Wellington: Education Review Office.

³² Higgins, J. (2001). *Developing numeracy: Understanding place value*. Report to the Ministry of Education. Wellington: Ministry of Education.

knowledges it was found that there was a reliance on populist literature and media-driven explanations of boys and their schooling needs that led to practices “that essentialize the categories of boys and girls” (p. 450). Masculinity and femininity were constructed in stereotypically binary ways with boys being seen as naturally active and impulsive while girls were characterized as more passive and contemplative. The upshot was that a certain kind of masculinity (and femininity) became entrenched in the ethos of the school meaning that there was a focus on meeting the needs of a particular kind of boy rather than catering for the diverse needs of all learners. With such a gender regime permeating both policy and practice and no understanding of the social construction of gender there were no “spaces for boys to consider the effects of narrow definitions of masculinity and, hence what it means to be a male” (p. 451). In effect what was being reinforced was the particular ‘gender order’ (Connell, 2002) that permeates the more populist literature about boys; the commonsense assumptions about boys as being an homogeneous group that all learn and behave in certain ways in contrast to those of girls. It was found that it in this way particular fixed ‘truths’ about boys and girls, already established in the wider culture and based in essentialist views about gender, become institutionalized in the school (Martino *et al.*, 2004). The researchers concluded that without an understanding of how the social construction of gender influences attitudes to school and relationships within schools, efforts to address problems, such as the anti-school attitudes of some boys, which are underpinned by “essentialist and biologically determinist teacher knowledges about gender and schooling” (p. 451) have the potential to exacerbate rather than address such problems.

There are striking parallels between the comments made by the principal and teachers as recorded by Martino *et al.* (2004) and the recently reported comments of two Christchurch secondary school principals (O’Callaghan, 2014). Asked to respond to a research report finding that boys in single-sex schools are performing

better than their counterparts in co-educational schools (Wylie & Berg, 2014), the Christchurch Boys' High principal, Nic Hill, referred to relationships with teachers forged through sport and physical activity "more than 60 per cent of the school's teachers coached sport, compared with 30 per cent across other schools, which created more of a connection with students" (O'Callaghan, 2014, p. A3). Shirley Boys' High principal, John Laurenson described boys as "geared for physical stuff and often shied away against the achievements of female students". He continued that "boys' schools often fostered camaraderie and mateship while catering to their specific and competitive nature" (O'Callaghan, 2014, p. A3) while the principal in Martino *et al.*'s study described boys as "more predisposed to being active" and that "it is through physical activity that boys are more likely to 'open up' and to develop relationships with the teacher (2004, p. 442). Interestingly, Wylie, the Aotearoa New Zealand researcher and co-author of the report was quoted as speculating that single-sex schools "appear to be ditching the sporty stereotype for one where it is 'cool to achieve'" (O'Callaghan, p. A3). I would argue that the principals' comments are indicative of the ways in which particular gendered effects are produced in schools. Such comments from school leaders show how:

teacher knowledges about gender and schooling are based on problematic normalizing assumptions about boys as a group, which emphasize that boys are predisposed to behaving, thinking and learning in particular ways, as a result of simply being boys. In this way, what may be identified as the effects of quite specific social training and attitudes become inscribed on the sexed body and are read off the body as behavioural effects, produced as a result of brain-sex or hormonal differences (Martino *et al.*, 2004, p. 436).

As indicated by Martino *et al.* what needs to happen is that, through a programme of pre-service and in-service professional development, principals and teachers need access to more sophisticated knowledges about the social construction of gender and how these processes affect the lives and the lived schooling experiences of both boys and girls. Such knowledges need to be grounded in sound research-based

understandings about the social construction of gender if we are to ensure that social and educational outcomes are maximized for all learners.

Possible Ways Forward

Important principles of the Aotearoa New Zealand curriculum documents are inclusion and diversity as a way of ensuring that all pupils' identities are recognized and affirmed and their learning needs are met. Differences, including gender differences, are to be valued and respected (Ministry of Education, 1996, 2007).

"Quality teaching respects and affirms cultural identity (including gender identity) and optimises educational opportunities" (Alton-Lee, 2003, p. vii). In the pursuit of greater gender justice for children in schools and drawing on available evidence, especially from this research project, I want to suggest a number of implications to be considered and several specific strategies that we as teachers and teacher educators can employ in the pursuit of these lofty social justice goals.

What emerges very clearly from this project is that all boys cannot be treated as belonging to a single homogeneous category all with identical learning needs. It is crucial that we move beyond unhelpful binary thinking of boys versus girls to a recognition that within both genders individuals differ in how they negotiate their subjectivities and hence respond to learning opportunities. Being aware of and getting to know these differences is fundamental to meeting the social and academic needs of all boys and all girls. As Lingard *et al.* (2002) note, an alternative and preferable approach, based on the good effects achieved by schools in their research that worked in this way, was to ask which girls and which boys are having problems at school and to make informed decisions regarding policy and practice on this basis rather than on generalized assumptions about differences between boys and girls. With some boys in my research project constituting their masculinities in restrictive ways (rejecting anything perceived to be 'feminine' in order to avoid being a 'freak',

for example) it is worth noting that Lingard and his colleagues report that classrooms that engaged with and valued difference enabled both boys and girls “to act outside of what was often considered as ‘normal’ gendered behaviours” (p. 128).

Questioning and troubling restrictive understandings of masculinity is advocated by Amanda Keddie (2005) as a way of supporting boys to broaden their understandings of masculinity. We have all heard the plaintive cries of ‘it’s not fair’ from children who feel an injustice has been perpetrated, usually on them but not always. Glenda MacNaughton (2000) suggests that this is a good starting point from which to help children begin to recognize how their “desires, understandings and actions” (p. 240) are shaped by gender and the power consequences that follow on from this. She describes this as introducing “young children to the embryonic processes of deconstruction³³” (p. 240). I can well imagine the effectiveness of talking with young children about the fairness of some of the gender boundaries they construct and police around their particular desires and activities, for example, a boy wanting to dress up as a princess, as opening up possibilities for collective deliberation on understandings of gender. It would be achieved by introducing children to higher order thinking skills, such as questioning or making judgements about the worth of ideas or actions, not in the abstract but in an age-appropriate manner that makes important links with both their lived and their imagined experiences. Although writing about her work with undergraduate education students, Bronwyn Davies describes her aspirations for them as:

the students have to be able to catch language in the act of shaping subjectivities. An examination of their own writing, or of their own storytelling, or of their own acts of reading can be ideal means by which they can begin to catch the text in the act of constituting (Davies, 1997, p.280).

³³ Julie Allan defines deconstruction as “a process of reading texts with an eye out for their blind spots, contradictions and obfuscations” (2009, p. 6).

It goes without saying that if we are to assist children to explore how discourses shape their subjectivities we must first learn to ‘catch ourselves in the act’ with language and texts which my experience of reflecting on the use of the text *William’s Doll* shows that it is possible but it takes time and is something that has to be worked at constantly. Although it is something of a hackneyed phrase making use of the ‘teachable moment’ would be one way of engaging in collective explorations of gendered discourses. Mindy Blaise (2005) describes how Isabel, the classroom teacher she worked with in her research, exploited just such a moment. One of the girls, Madison, queried the lack of Lego girl characters at their toy table. Letters were sent to the company and the replies were shared and discussed during the regular class meeting time which was attended by older story partners³⁴. Isabel facilitated a discussion with all the children about gender inequity in their lives and some of the older girls related how video games they liked to play had mostly boy characters and ‘really lame’ girl characters. It is in this way that issues of fairness were introduced and explored. Through such teaching strategies MacNaughton (2000) maintains that children’s storylines can be extended and their discursive repertoires increased. Davies (2003) describes such work with children as engaging them in a process of recognizing and understanding what is, and how we come to take this up as our own. She sees the use of feminist stories as part of this process by relating what might be. I had thought that reading stories such as *William’s Doll* had the potential to do just that, and still do, but realise it is far from a simple task since children hear what might be through their experiences of what is. These understandings of what is are not abstract and are the result of embodied learning that is acquired through direct experiences as children engage in the continuing struggle of constructing and negotiating their gendered subjectivities. By encouraging and supporting children to deconstruct their everyday experiences in the ways outlined here we can facilitate their “engagement in a collective process of

³⁴ Story Partners is “a time when the kindergarten class meets with second- and third-grade students for approximately 45 minutes to take part in shared reading” (p. 110).

re-naming, re-writing, re-positioning oneself in relation to coercive structures” (Davies, 1993, p. 199). For boys, particularly those who cling to dominant stereotypes and perpetuate very restrictive masculinities these exercises in deconstruction would potentially enable them to broaden out their understandings and by this means lead to better social outcomes for them and best realise the curriculum aspirations for them of valuing and be more inclusive of difference and diversity.

A ‘best practice’ framework for boys’ education has been proposed in the context of Queensland, Australia (Keddie, 2005). It embraces what many, including me, would consider to be the important principles of and prerequisites for ‘quality teaching’ (Alton-Lee, 2003) and learning for both boys and girls. In fact, Keddie (2005), while positioning the framework as “particularly important for boys and, more especially, disengaged boys” (2005, p. 63), does acknowledge its promise of enhancing the social and academic outcomes for both boys and girls. Perhaps quality teaching and learning for all is the most equitable answer to the ‘what about the boys’ question. The important components of the framework are “quality pedagogy and positive teacher-student relationships that are informed by sophisticated research-based understandings about gender” (Keddie, 2005, p. 63). ‘Quality pedagogy’ is said to consist of four dimensions—intellectual quality, connectedness, a supportive classroom environment and recognition of difference (pp. 63-64). ‘Intellectual quality’ involves encouraging learning in-depth via critical and higher order thinking, ‘connectedness’ involves relating the learning to real-world issue and to students’ background experiences and knowledge, a ‘supportive environment’ involves mutual respect and affords students a measure of control over their learning, and ‘recognition of difference’ is all about inclusion of different cultures and other ways of knowing (p. 64). I suggest that these components are time-honoured, fundamental and well understood aspects of what constitutes ‘good teaching’ for those of us in early childhood. The dimension that perhaps we need to focus on more is “connecting with boys lifeworlds by facilitating their exploration of

their personal experiences of what it means to be 'masculine'" (p. 65). The aim here would be to enable boys to see masculinity as socially constructed leading to a broadening of ways of being especially for boys who constitute themselves through "binary understandings of 'masculinity' as superior and oppositional to 'femininity' (p. 71). One strategy Keddie (2005) advocates is for classroom experiences to include explorations of dance and drama (both of which are requirements of the Aotearoa New Zealand curriculum) which are often positioned as stereotypically 'feminine pursuits' (p. 69). I cannot imagine many boys not being engaged by popular styles of dance such as hip-hop. If children were encouraged to express their learning in a variety of ways including bodily, with dance as a recognized option, then we might just begin to move understandings of what it means to be 'masculine' in the direction of the notion of 'masculinities' and a more caring and inclusive learning environment.

Interestingly, Keddie (2005) characterizes schools in Queensland as being driven more by an imperative to acquire basic skills rather than engaging in the quality teaching and learning as represented in the 'best practice' framework (p. 59). She suggests that this ethos may well be an impediment to improving social and academic outcomes for boys. It will be interesting to see if the recent moves to National Standards in reading, writing and mathematics in Aotearoa New Zealand primary and intermediate schools, discussed in more detail in the next section, and the increased emphasis on improving achievements in literacy and numeracy prove to be similarly counterproductive. It is perhaps not the most obvious avenue for future research into gender issues in education in Aotearoa New Zealand, but it may well be an excellent place to start.

Issues for Further Research: A Way to Go?

When I embarked on this research project I imagined that not only was I going to explore the production and contestation of masculinities amongst primary school children but that I would also be able to identify direct links between the social, cultural, historical and political constructions of masculinities and the academic and social outcomes for boys. I envisaged being able to identify strategies teachers could use to address these issues and trying out some of them in schools. While this project does shed some light on the complexities and contestatory nature of the discursive production of gender amongst young children, the remainder of those rather more ambitious research aspirations is still to be accomplished. Realistically my project is perhaps better characterized as a brief foray into somewhat uncharted territory in educational research in Aotearoa New Zealand. It touches only briefly on the wider socio-political context within which Aotearoa New Zealand schools currently operate. We need to know more about how the schooling experiences of children are affected by this context and how this might influence the production of their gendered subjectivities. Claire Charles (2010) notes the increased attention to girls in popular culture and academic research. She describes the research focus within this emerging field as drawing “attention to multiple ways in which femininities are regulated, particularly in relation to forms of neoliberal subjectivity” (p. 34).

Exploring how the neoliberal context shapes and regulates gender and sexualities in Aotearoa New Zealand might well add to our understanding of how schooling operates as a site for the re/production of masculinities and femininities.

The most recent initiative in New Zealand schools consistent with the neoliberal rhetoric of ‘performance goals’, ‘accountability’, ‘raising standards’ and ‘excellence’ has been the introduction of National Standards for primary and intermediate schools (Years 0-8, 5-13 year olds). National Standards are an assessment system that is narrowly focussed on literacy and numeracy which was announced in 2007 and

became mandatory in 2011. Ostensibly designed to raise levels of pupil achievement it amounts to another layer of surveillance, yet another form of Foucauldian governmentality or “the conduct of conduct: that is to say, a form of activity aiming to shape guide or affect the conduct of some person or persons” (Gordon, 1991, p. 2). Teachers are required to label children and report to parents whether their child is performing ‘well below’, ‘below’, ‘at’ or ‘above’ the standard. Stephen J. Ball (2003) describes it as ‘performativity’ which he defines as a form of state regulation where individuals have to set aside their personal beliefs and “organize themselves as a response to targets, indicators and evaluations” (p. 215). The upshot of policies and practices such as National Standards is even more emphasis on educational achievement possibly at the expense of social outcomes for children. There is concern that the required reporting of this information to the Ministry of Education and the public release of it will give impetus to comparisons being made between schools and between different groups of pupils, for example between boys and girls . Research into gender issues in education conducted within this finer detail of neoliberalism should increase our understandings of how masculinities and femininities are shaped with reference to these emerging neoliberal subjectivities.

A final issue for further investigation relates to how subjectivities are discursively constituted at the intersections of gender, class, , ethnicity, dis/ability and sexuality and so on. Despite my best efforts to design my research to take account of variables such as class and ethnicity by working in two schools with different decile ratings and with school populations of differing ethnic and racial mixes, there appeared to be very little difference in the dynamics of how the children constructed and negotiated their gendered subjectivities or the forms of masculinities and femininities that I was able to observe in each school. Research that is able to explore questions of intersectionality and gendered subjectivities more explicitly may lead to a better understanding of how these understandings are played out in Aotearoa New Zealand schools and their implications for students and teachers alike.

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Appendices

University of Canterbury
Education Department

Information Sheet for Principal and Board of Trustees

I am a Ph.D. student working in the area of the educational achievement of boys. I am particularly interested in investigating the impact that constructions of masculinity have on boys' participation and achievement in literacy and physical education. Your school is invited to participate in the research project:

The Impact of Constructions of Masculinities on Boys' Learning

The aim of the project is to seek answers to the following questions in order to address gaps in our understanding of gender differences in New Zealand:

- How are different ways of understanding masculinities played out in New Zealand primary schools?
- What impact does this have on boys' learning?
- How can teachers address issues related to the achievement of boys?

If you agree to your school being involved in this project one class of six-year olds would become participants in the research. As I am a fully qualified teacher with a current practicing certificate, I would like to work alongside their classroom teacher during the literacy programme by reading stories to small groups of children. Once a rapport had been established I would conduct focus group interviews with groups of the children. Then, for one week, the children would be videotaped during their literacy and physical education lessons and I would observe selected children during this time. I would also collect information, from existing records, about the children's achievement levels in literacy and physical education. I would also observe children outside of the classroom. Should any of the children become upset during the interviewing or observations, recording would cease. You would have the right to withdraw from the research at any time, including withdrawal of any information provided.

Your written consent and the consent of the children's teacher and parents/guardians would be obtained before any of this work commenced. I will share with you my analysis and interpretation of the data I collect. You will be invited to comment on the data analysis and interpretation. At a later date I would like to work in the same class to devise, try out and assess strategies to address any issues related to the achievement of boys that may emerge from the research.

The results of the project may be published, but you may be assured of complete confidentiality of data gathered in this investigation. The identity of participants will not be made public without their consent and to ensure anonymity and confidentiality code names will be used for the teacher, the children and your school. All data will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in my home. At the conclusion of the study all data will be shredded and all video tapes will be wiped.

The project is being supervised by Dr. Judi Miller, Senior Lecturer at the University of Canterbury, who can be contacted by email at judi.miller@canterbury.ac.nz or by telephoning 364 2546. She will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about your participation in the project.

The project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee. In order to proceed with this project I require your written consent. A copy of the consent form will be provided so that it can be retained by you.

Graeme W. Ferguson

Consent Form

I have read and understood the description of the project. On this basis I agree to our school participating in the project, and I consent to publication of the results with the understanding that anonymity will be preserved. I understand also that I may at any time withdraw from the project, including withdrawal of any information that I have provided.

Signed (Principal)

Date

Signed (Board of Trustees)

Date

University of Canterbury
Education Department

Information Sheet for Teachers

I am a Ph.D. student working in the area of the educational achievement of boys. I am particularly interested in investigating the impact that constructions of masculinity have on boys' participation and achievement in literacy and physical education. You are invited to participate in the research project:

The Impact of Constructions of Masculinities on Boys' Learning

The aim of the project is to seek answers to the following questions in order to address gaps in our understanding of gender differences in New Zealand:

- How are different ways of understanding masculinities played out in New Zealand primary schools?
- What impact does this have on boys' learning?
- How can teachers address issues related to the achievement of boys?

If you agree to be involved in this project the children in your class of six-year olds would become participants in the research. As I am a fully qualified teacher with a current practicing certificate, I would like to work alongside you during your literacy programme by reading stories to small groups of children. Once a rapport had been established I would conduct focus group interviews with groups of the children. Then, for one week, the children would be videotaped during their literacy and physical education lessons and I would observe selected children during this time. I would also collect information, from existing records, about the children's achievement levels in literacy and physical education. I would also spend some time observing the children outside of the classroom. Should any of the children become upset during the interviewing or observations, recording would cease. You would have the right to withdraw from the research at any time, including withdrawal of any information provided.

Your written consent and the consent of the children's parents/guardians would be obtained before any of this work commenced. I will share with you all data that I collect and my analysis of it. You will be invited to contribute to this process by sharing your ideas on the data analysis and interpretation. At a later date I would like to work with you to devise, try out and assess strategies to address any issues related to the achievement of boys that may emerge from the research.

The results of the project may be published, but you may be assured of complete confidentiality of data gathered in this investigation. The identity of participants will not be made public without their consent and to ensure anonymity and confidentiality code names will be used for you, the children and your school. All data will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in my home. At the conclusion of the study all data will be shredded and all video tapes will be wiped.

The project is being supervised by Dr. Judi Miller, Senior Lecturer at the University of Canterbury, who can be contacted by email at judi.miller@canterbury.ac.nz or by telephoning 364 2546. She will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about your participation in the project.

The project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee. In order to proceed with this project I require your written consent. A copy of the consent form will be provided so that it can be retained by you as a participant.

Graeme W. Ferguson

Consent Form

I have read and understood the description of the project. On this basis I agree to participate as a teacher in the project, and I consent to publication of the results with the understanding that anonymity will be preserved. I understand also that I may at any time withdraw from the project, including withdrawal of any information that I have provided.

Signed (Teacher)

Date

University of Canterbury
Education Department

Information Sheet for Parents

I am a Ph.D. student working in the area of the educational achievement of boys. I am particularly interested in investigating the impact that constructions of masculinity have on boys' participation and achievement in literacy and physical education. I am seeking your consent for your son/daughter to participate in the research project:

The Impact of Constructions of Masculinities on Boys' Learning

The aim of the project is to seek answers to the following questions in order to address gaps in our understanding of gender differences in New Zealand:

- How are different ways of understanding masculinities played out in New Zealand primary schools?
- What impact does this have on boys' learning?
- How can teachers address issues related to the achievement of boys?

If you agree, your child would become a participant in the research. As I am a fully qualified teacher with a current practicing certificate, I would work in your child's class alongside your child's teacher. During the literacy programme I would read stories to small groups of children. Once a rapport had been established I would conduct focus group interviews with groups of the children. Then, for one week, the children would be videotaped during their literacy and physical education lessons and I would observe selected children during this time. Your child may not be one of the small group who will be observed directly. I would also collect information, from existing records, about the children's achievement levels in literacy and physical education. I would also spend some time observing children outside the classroom. You would have the right to withdraw your child from the research at any time, including withdrawal of any information provided. Should any of the children become upset during the interviewing or observations, recording would cease.

Your written consent and the consent of your child would be obtained before any of this work commenced. I will share with you my analysis of the data I collect and invite to you comment on the data analysis and interpretation. At a later date I would like to work with your child's class by trying out and assessing strategies to address any issues related to the achievement of boys that may emerge from the research.

The results of the project may be published, but you may be assured of complete confidentiality of data gathered in this investigation. The identity of participants will not be made public without their consent and to ensure anonymity and confidentiality code names will be used for the children and their school. All data will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in my home. At the conclusion of the study all data will be shredded and all videotapes will be wiped.

The project is being supervised by Dr. Judi Miller, Senior Lecturer at the University of Canterbury, who can be contacted by email at judi.miller@canterbury.ac.nz or by telephoning 364 2546. She will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about your participation in the project.

The project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee. In order to proceed with this project I require your written consent. A copy of the consent form will be provided so that it can be retained by you as the parent/guardian of one of the children participating in the research.

Graeme W. Ferguson

Consent Form

I have read and understood the description of the project. On this basis I agree to my child participating in the project, and I consent to publication of the results with the understanding that anonymity will be preserved. I understand also that my child may at any time withdraw from the project, including withdrawal of any information that has been provided.

Signed (Parent)

Date

Signed..... (Child)

Date



Ref: HEC 2005/32

10 June 2005

Graeme Ferguson
Education
UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

Dear Graeme

The Human Ethics Committee advises that your research proposal "**Impact of constructions of masculinities on boys' learning**" has been considered and approved.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C Moran'.

Dr Catherine Moran
Interim Chair